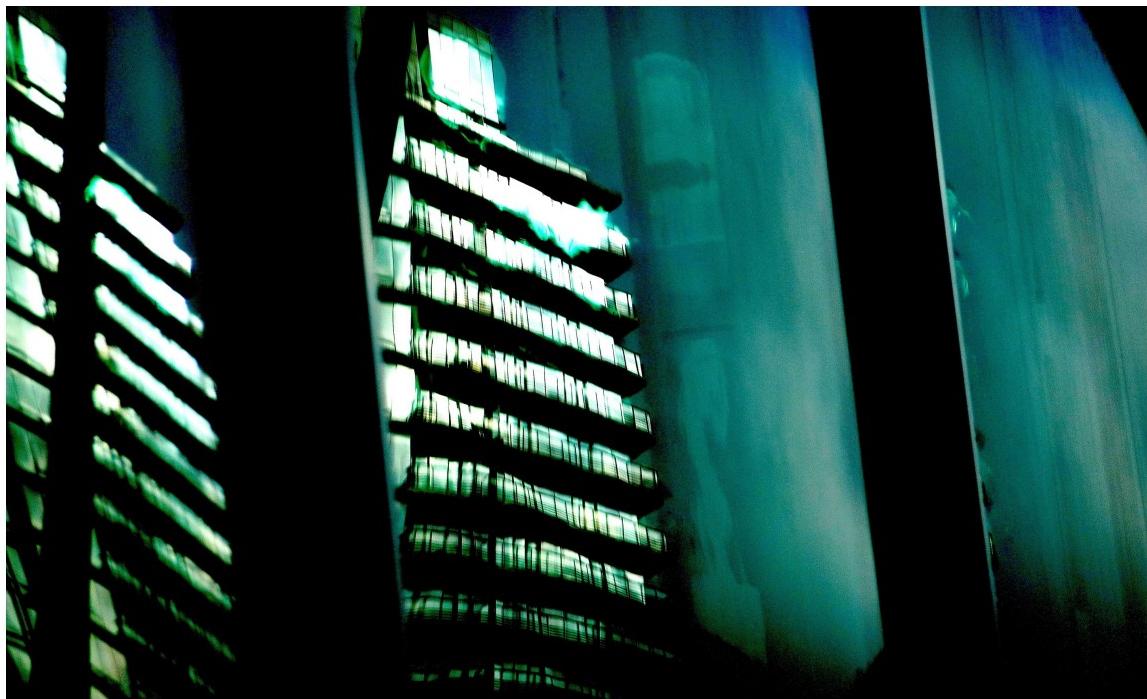


Lesley Battler | Journal | 1995



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Journal archive project

Introduction

As a young reader i was fascinated by diaries, journals, notebooks of all kinds. Perhaps part of that attraction was that they seemed a way of telling your own story, remaking the world as you went on. “They” never have the final say in your journal.

I grew up in a family that was shattered by mental illness and writing in a journal was a discipline and a way of keeping myself together; proof I could build an independent life. I was never big on recording my most intimate feelings or expressing myself. For me, the journal existed to help me let go and move beyond the emotional, interior world. I was so much more interested in recording the flora and fauna of the mundane. Daily life was exotic to me.

From the 1980s and on into the Naughts, I wrote in a journal, which I eventually transcribed into electronic format as a project to keep me occupied during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. At first it felt like a self-indulgent pastime, certainly a little irrelevant considering world-events, but as I continued I started feeling maybe there was some value to the project. I decided to preserve them as archives, format them as PDFs and release them onto the Internet where anyone can search, download and use any of the material for projects of their own.

To me, this journal is really an archive, portrait of an era as seen by one insignificant person. It’s the insignificance that is truly key here. I love the archives and records of the invisible lives that accumulate into social zeitgeists. Being a journal, it’s hit-and-miss what I wrote about, or had time to write about. Huge chunks of my life never made it to the page while there may be hundreds of words devoted to a movie I enjoyed on a hot summer night. I have not added any narrative arc or changed names to keep the journal as intact as possible.

In such a long time span the journal volumes reveal a generation trying to find their way in the world; me and so many of my friends and acquaintances working contract jobs, going to community colleges to learn vocational skills. Spoiler alert: societal change, turbulence, employment issues, generational conflict were just as strong then as they are now. While transcribing the journals I also became fascinated by the rhythm of daily life, how periods of calm so often erupt into times of intense change.

I have taken the original journals and reformatted them into chronological years that begin in January and end in December, and I have included a synopsis with each one to provide a little context. I preserved as much as possible the style and quirks of the original handwritten journals and only employed some light editing to correct place names, and obvious mis-spellings.

These volumes are meant for anyone who is interested in the 1980s and 1990s, in archives, in the lives of young people trying to find a place in the world, in personal impressions of socio-economic-cultural events. This, of course, includes the introduction of the Internet to our daily lives. Please feel free to browse, reuse, recycle any of this material for your own projects. After all this time I still believe information wants to be free.

Vol. 15, 1995

Morning commute – Impending strikes – Fascist architecture – Jan Karski, Polish resistance hero – I write a piece about the Internet for Windsor World – “An Internet Odyssey” is picked up by the CPR News – The ubiquity of *What Colour is Your Parachute* – French classes at night – Symbolism, the lost paradise – Close friends become parents – Latest wave of restructuring – Screaming fights at work – The Québec referendum on sovereignty – “Internet Odyssey” wins an industry award – Devil’s night in Michigan – Money and the ethnic vote – CPR moves its head office to Calgary, Alberta – Back on the job search.

Lesley Battler journal | 1995

Jan. 4

Another morning on the commuter train. Those already seated have moated themselves with briefcases, laptops so no one can sit beside them. Private school girls oozing from car to car. The train conductor smirks slightly as if plotting his ticket-taking strategy. Railway ties stacked like pyres in fields. Eventually the train reaches centre-ville and we all disembark, moving as one organism off the train and disperse, twinkling down the side streets, disappearing one by one into office buildings. Business rapture. Sky, an exquisite shade of blue, shimmers across glass.

First coffee, morning lunge of the printer, the fax machine talks to itself in the corner. Offices are asylums of beeping, babbling, clacking machines. I pull off the morning's e-mail demands. I want to be in Paris, I'd love to visit Martinique, why couldn't I teach ESL in Prague? Betty asks, HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND as she does every single Monday of every week I've been working here. In such an oddly belligerent tone! I'm a minotaur at the centre of my little labyrinth. Couriers enter like shell-shocked Supermen bringing their tribute to me to sign, bringing me news of the outside world. The only way of gauging the weather here in Ice Station Business is touching the FedEx packages. Shall I commit a senseless act of violence and not re-load paper in the fax machine before leaving work?

Then I descend into the mole world of Place Bonaventure, through the imperious swirl of full-length winter coats. Carlton Cards hawking Valentine's Day already, January bereft as it is of holidays and romance. The busker caught in the brown Bonaventure passage only knows three chords but he plays them with panache.

CP people pass me on the escalator, flowing the opposite direction. A quick wave, a nod, a smile, contact made, the microfilm delivered. Outside, the sky is crystalline blue blending into the skinned pearl of snow. Migration of people to the train.

**

Ice storm. Deadly beauty. Telephone lines like strings of a musical instrument. Gleaming trees, twigs entombed in ice, beauty and entombment. Power failures all over the city. Went to both McLennan and Webster libraries in search of a book recommended on the Crewton list, but both were dark caverns. All activity had ceased. Neither library has a back-up circulation system. Students waiting by the entrances as if spellbound. Stores and cafés in suspended animation.

**

Called Patty. She's doing reasonably well, still with Revenue Canada but not in the same job. She's on some kind of term contract and doesn't know how long it will last. Her boyfriend Rommel is on a photo shoot in the Philippines and will be back in late February. It's nice hearing Patty's thoughtful, reflective voice. She went to BC for the holidays and for the first time since she left she didn't feel at home and found herself responding to Port Alberni and even Victoria as a "citified Torontonian." "What do you mean it's half an hour until the next bus?" She said she was glad I called so she could procrastinate on doing her laundry. This may be the best thing about having a house – a washer and dryer in the basement. What a luxury!

Jan. 25

Impending strike; all railways affected. All management and non-unionized personnel are to be trained for working on the track. Everyone is being sent for strike medicals. Carol says all her management cronies are looking forward to going out to the yards and are full of group spirit. I see a bunch of desk jockeys who think blue collar work is fun team work, like a school field day. I imagine they won't feel the same after two hours of repetitive manual labour in the middle of winter.

Maybe someone will even make a connection between work of this nature and unions. Carol said all of these poor managers are looking forward to strike duty because they're so stressed out answering phones and having to do things ASAP. Sometimes Carol seems a little like a Romanov princess – not much awareness of real life.

Jan. 29

Met Marsha, John, Terry and Carole at Chenoy's. Marsha is now showing. The contrast between Marsha and Carole: Marsha sprawled on the seat, Carole sitting upright, self-contained. Marsha regaled us with stories of herself at seventeen, further installments of her life story, as CGIT member, babysitting, working in the library. Carole said she was on her own at 17 and not another word about it. Marsha's eyes brown eyes flaming, liquefying; Carole' brown eyes steady, her gaze level. Of course Bill was also present, goggle-eyed and snarky as ever. Marsha said he had a terrible fight with Eileen. She was upset over the way Bill treated his mother at one of Eileen's dinners. Who gets into fights with Eileen, of all people? Marsha then turned to me and asked, very pointedly, "How was *your* January?" This didn't sound like Marsha and I said, "Huh? What? Fine. Same old." Then I realized she had just slipped into chaplain mode. Everyone takes their work home with them some way or another.

**

Pleasant surprise: Deena Grier interviewed by Louise Penney on the CBC. A group of astrologers have cast a horoscope for Canada and Québec and they chose Deena as spokesperson. If anyone can make astrology sound friendly and rational, Deena can. Even her pauses for breath were so familiar to me. Louise Penney seemed to be enjoying the spot too. I called Deena to tell her how much I had enjoyed hearing her on the CBC. I had forgotten how stimulating she is and how easy it is to talk to her. She sounded delighted to hear from me and we talked about so many things.

She has so many interests. Surrounded as she is by artists, astrologers, new age spiritualists, non-conformists of all types she retains a refreshing streak of common sense and pragmatism. About our move to Dorval she said, "You go where the cheap houses are?" Contrast that response to Mary Rose and some others. Deena's daughter and family have just moved to Dorval. She said she couldn't get over how many stay-at-home mothers there still are out there and said her daughter is surrounded by fifties throw-backs. I said I noticed the same thing. It seems only Christine and J-P are the only young working couple who live near us.

I mentioned one of my biggest gripes about the West Island. Anglos are always claiming francophones are a closed, xenophobic group that know nothing about the outside world except for New England, Florida or maybe Paris. Yet all these West Island anglos seem to have lived here all their lives, an alarming number of them in their childhood neighbourhoods. Wendy Langill moved one street over and Bob and Wendy live two houses down from Bob's parents. Fred's mother, who lived on this street when Fred was 4 or 5, knows the Langills and the woman who used to live across the street, where Christine and J-P live now. The whole West Island seems to be this way, an entire network of people who all know each other, are related to each other. And where do they go on vacation? New England and Florida. Anyway, it's just so much fun talking to Deena. I miss her and Susan Kelly.

Feb. 3

85% in favour of strike action at CP. Via and CN to vote this week. They are planning on turning everyone into scabs by replacing the unionized railworkers with management and clerical staff. CP figures this will ensure they retain 60% of their business. The atmosphere at Windsor Station is strange. It's like war with people being summoned to take physicals. The buzz in the buffet is all whether people have passed their physicals or got off. Elise got off because of her knee, Heather because of her back. Not that I thought for a minute Heather would be going. She's accumulated a lot of power in her years at CP and does exactly what she wants, no more, no less. Véronique can't touch her; Heather makes her nervous.

Ginette, Carol and Véronique passed their physicals. Ginette returned to BIS with the strike gear which is being given to everyone. The crotch of her strike-issue coveralls bags almost to her knees. She was also issued a blue hard hat and enormous steel-toed boots. Ginette is very slight, she won't be able to move in those boots. She is to go to the St-Luc yards to chip ice off signal boxes. The varying feelings reflect a basic difference in social class. Ginette doesn't want to go. She has a young daughter and I don't think she gets much support from her husband. Meanwhile Carol, who came in later with her strike outfit, burbled again about how the managers think it will be an exciting break. Sheesh!

**

Met Cynthia, Jennifer Innes and their friend Ivanka at Mad Hatter's. A very British pub full of McGill factions. Our group was there as well as Diane Cassidy, Bruce Whiteman and his cronies and a couple of others lurking in corners, playing by Russian rules I presume. Jennifer is bright and high-spirited and her opinions are both fixed and rather amusing. I don't feel any age gap when I'm with Cynthia but I do with Jennifer. I enjoy her outspokenness about McGill and the Law Library where she works. Although she's been there for a few years now, she's still ostracized by the rest of the staff, considered an upstart. I sometimes wonder what will become of her and Cynthia in the McGill system.

Interesting to see how seriously Cynthia is taking her new supervisor position. She is very much like Jane when it comes to rules and policy, is hilariously fierce when she's saying no to students. I enjoyed the evening at Mad Hatter's but cherished my walk alone with Cynthia to Bonaventure Station. We had a chance to talk about *The Madness of King George*, Brother Cadfael and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. We hugged and kissed. We're too much alike in some ways to get together very often. We confessed to each other that if the Mad Hatter's evening had been cancelled we would have just gone home and read a book or watched Brother Cadfael on TV. We understand each other. Trouble is, we'll never see each other either.

Boarded the ferry to the underworld, the 211 bus. There really is a long distance feel to this bus, especially at night well after rush hour when it seems to speed like a Voyageur to the Dorval terminus.

Feb. 15

Open house at the house where Fred grew up in Beaconsfield. From the outside it's a nondescript yellow house with a couple of tiny windows inserted in odd places. I was completely surprised when I stepped inside. It's a spacious, elegant split-level. The living room is vast and there are three half-stores, a little like a Snakes & Ladders game. The kitchen is on a level below the living room which gives it a cool sunken quality. I really liked the house and could imagine living in it.

Feb. 6

At work a courier brought in a box and plunked it down in front of me. It was from "The International Center of Conformity." I think it was a message from God.

**

Finally saw *Schindler's List*. So much has been written about it, the trick is to find my own viewpoint on the movie. I thought it was good and was moved by the ending but a lot of the criticism it received was fair. It's a good movie, a conventional movie with a narrative structure, building of event, climax, denouement. Spielberg presents the Holocaust in this conventional structure to a mainstream audience who expects these elements to be in a movie and there's nothing difficult or challenging in the form he's used. A movie like this will reach the masses.

It is beautifully photographed. At first the black and white looks European but after a while it seemed distinctly American to me. Maybe it's the framing and editing, each frame composed with a subject and background arranged around it. There's a story-telling component in every frame, an advancement of the narrative. The other thing that seems so American to me is that although it's about the Holocaust it isn't as gritty or deep-down as a film like the British film, *The Cement Garden* – or even an episode of *Cracker*.

Spielberg has been accused of whitewashing the Holocaust and I definitely agree with that charge. Although the faces were compelling, the Jews in the ghetto and in the camp were way too clean, healthy – too photogenic. It looked as if he had called “European Casting” for the ghetto and camp scenes. Amazing how these people would have been able to wash their hair and pluck their eyebrows. Spielberg couldn’t resist resorting to one of his old tricks, conveying horror through shots of adorable children in hiding places. But it was a good movie, has reached a huge audience and is very moving. Schindler at the end of the war, broken with guilt, saying “1200 Jews were only a tiny fraction … I could have save more if only I had done this ...”

Feb. 24-26

Although it’s been a mild winter, this weekend was freezing cold, as cold as last January when I felt spellbound, the little cottage deep in the Black Forest sinking slowly into the snow. A long arctic drive to Ottawa to visit Val. It’s been a while since we’ve driven in the Ottawa direction and it was wild, snow flaying the road, no visibility. No amenities, no exits (or bathrooms), nowhere to stop. Finally made it, the government buildings floating in the distance, urban oasis appearing out of the tundra. We slid through them as if warping ourselves through holographs and found Val’s address. She can really draw a map!

Val’s lair is on the top floor of a regal old building, reminding me a lot of Côte St-Antoine. I entered another world as soon as I was introduced to “Blind Tiresias,” a sleeping dragon whose eyes weren’t painted in. Every inch of Val’s apartment is filled. Native artifacts side by side with some of her mother’s antiques (on loan, of course). Hand-painted plates on the wall, wonderful curtains, vintage tablecloths, textiles of all sorts. She may say she doesn’t want to be alone and that all she yearns for is to find the right man, but this apartment is a little kingdom and it would take Steven Millhauser to do it justice.

She has closed herself in like someone under siege. She talked about how she hasn't seen anyone or done anything and I can see that. This is an interior world. We spent the entire weekend inside the apartment. We were going to go out dancing at Zaphod's and never got around to it. I could feel the cold all around us, sealing us in, coming in through the window panes, liming the brick of the neighbouring wall, rising through the floorboards. Fred and I set up our mattress on the floor and sunk into our down sleeping bag, which billowed like a blue ocean over us. It was a state of suspension as if the usual rules of time had been suspended. I lived the entire weekend in dreamtime.

On Saturday night Val brought out a box of letters and we tried to unravel the tangled skein of our past, the Dostoyevskian plots, conspiracies, lettres-de-cachets, etc, etc. The usual suspects: Val, Al, Sharon, Jim, me. The peripheral characters: Fred, Marsha, Boot, Flo, the nebulous "gang." The cities: Kingston, Montréal, Ottawa, Toronto, Prescott and Barrie. The stage where all the characters assembled: our wedding. Val pulled out AL's final letter to her and claimed she hadn't looked at it in years. Fred read it and then I looked at it. Al hroomed, boomed, pontificated and defended Sharon in every line.

He was hurt, angry and also deep in one of his christian phases. In this letter he indicated I was responsible for sending him the photocopies proving Val was still interfering with his and Sharon's happiness. At the time, the only access I would have had to a photocopier would have been through a public library and I don't remember gathering the pages, getting on a bus and going through the procedures. I still think Jim photocopied the letters at the Credit Union, where he worked, and sent them to Sharon. This was the height of voluminous correspondence between Sharon and Jim. Al's letter made it look as if I were a double agent, cloaking and daggering between Val and Sharon. I also don't know whether or not I should believe Val when she says she hasn't looked at the letter in years.

Whether on not she was telling the truth, it seemed to happen too easily that I picked up the letter and read it. I have a feeling I was meant to see that letter and I was supposed to atone for something. Even if I was the one who sent the photocopies, the only crime I really committed was wanting everyone to like me.

I did try to be on everyone's side because I didn't want to lose my friends (friendships I had probably outgrown by then but couldn't let go). I could see the situation from everyone's point of view and thought I could be a neutral friend, a sounding board. I did not ever intend to be a "double agent." I wish I had been like Marsha, strong enough to declare I was friends with everyone and would not take sides. I know I have said this privately to Val; there really isn't anything more I can say; I really don't even remember much about that time period between 3rd year Queen's and Seneca College.

We left late Sunday night. Piercingly cold. Got into the car and saw a ghostly Val waving to us from the door. It feels as if we dropped out of the world for the weekend, out of the entire time-space continuum.

**

Carol Lacourte talked me into submitting a piece on our Internet adventure (meeting a List-Serve friend) in Florida for *Windsor World*. I managed to thump out something short enough for WW, downloaded it into Merlin and sent it on to Carol. She really liked it. In fact, she said it was wonderful. She gave a copy to Gerry LaFontaine and he also told me it was wonderful. I'm really glad about that, it was just a fun piece to write.

March 8

Got a call from Ralph Wilson, who is a Communications Manager(?) in the public affairs part of our department. It seems as though *CP Rail News* has picked up my Internet piece and it running it in their "Banter" column. I am not thrilled at being featured in a column called "Banter. I'm also not thrilled by some of editing. He said he removed all of the "million-dollar words." There were no million-dollar words in the piece. I have a Master's degree – I know what I'm talking about. He also left in exactly the things I thought could be removed, and removed some things I thought were completely harmless. He left in a crack I made about George Bush but removed all references to the Silk Road. I have no idea why. All I know is way more people will see this Internet column in the *CP Rail News* than any story I could ever publish in a literary journal.

March 10

Someone from Visual Services came in to take my picture for the CP Rail News. Very creative. I had to gaze at the computer screen and pretend to point at something; the standard News photo. It was kind of fun though. Carol joked about me being a star. A few clients came in and I was able to say with deadpan expression, “Oh, just another photo shoot.”

**

Went to the CCA to see a film, *Disowned Architecture, Fascist Architecture, Mussolini in Italy*. An appropriately static film, stills of buildings. You could hardly call this a film at all. Adoring voice of the female narrator was a little odd. The architecture was presented as isolated from the world existing around it. Had no sense of how it fit into Italian society today, or how the buildings actually looked in context with the rest of their environment. Interesting resemblance between many of the buildings and the hulls of large ships.

Intriguing switch in style from the beginning of Mussolini’s regime to the end of it. At first it was all modern design; motion, progress, transportation, the future. As soon as the war started going badly the style switched to heavy classicism, evoking the Roman Empire. All of the interesting colour combinations, streamlined windows and balconies disappeared replaced by miles of gargantuan fake Roman temples, statues, pillars and vast concrete courtyards. The emptiness of fascism.

March 15

Strike has settled in. Eerie and dark in the concourse, no one around, no one cutting through the concourse, no tourists, film crews, amateur photographers, job searchers or homeless people. No public in the public concourse and it looks desolate. Security guards everywhere. They were fairly relaxed and only a few picketers paced around the station, but there was still a feeling of siege. Most of the Windsor Station exits were blocked and I had to find alternative passages to go anywhere in the building. I felt like a Romanov under palace arrest.

All the talk concerns who has gone and where, intensifying the wartime feeling. We talk about those who have been sent to work at western divisions as if they've been sent to the Russian front. Véronique has been sick with worry wondering when the call will come. She's on the reserve list for Manitoba. No one from our office has been sent yet and it feels like we're huddled in a bomb shelter at the end of the concourse. My Merlin in-basket is filled with strike bulletins, adding to the wartime crisis. They inform us of the progress of the strike, heaping praise on the management scabs replacing the union workers (and who have to replace the workers).

These bulletins reassure us the railway is operating at 60-80% of its capacity and end with the safety tip of the day. Actually, railway service throughout the entire country has ground to a halt. The longshoremen on the Port of Vancouver are on strike, and so are CN and VIA, which means back to work legislation can't be far behind.

Didn't have my pass to get into B-wing to go to the bathroom. Interrogated by a mournful looking security guard who didn't recognize my face. He finally let me sign in. Later, every time I passed by he joked with me, but with the same mournful expression. Although he was joking, I felt unsettled as if I didn't actually belong there. Because the station now closes at 6, there was a stampede of people leaving at 4:30-5:00. It looked like a mass exodus, people fleeing an evacuation site.

**

Met Cynthia. Had dinner at the Commensal and talked about the strike and being working class. We both wonder why only WCs know there is a working class. Talked about the strike at CP and the suits at McGill. Went to see Woody Allen's *Bullets Over Broadway*. As usual a visually stunning movie. It's one of his period pieces, great ensemble cast including Diane Wiest. Although it was very funny on a superficial level, it wasn't funny at all on a deeper level. It seems as if Allen had some pretty dark things to say about the fate of a real artist in society and the triumph of the hack.

**

Read and loved *The Little Town Where Time Stood Still* by Bohumil Hrabal.

“... no musical boxes wafted music out through windows, everything linked windows, everything linked with the old era had fallen anti-clockwise into a slumber ... and was slowly dying, the old time had stopped just like Sleeping Beauty eating a poisoned apple, and the Prince didn’t come, couldn’t even come, because the old society no longer had the required strength and courage, and so we had the era of great posters and great meetings, at which fists were shaken against everything that was old, and those who were living by the old time were at home, living quietly on memory ...” (pp 283-284)

**

Single White Female, surprisingly good for the first hour or so. Noirish, understated, creepy. Bridget Fonda good in her role as Jane, a young woman trying to do the right thing with her fiancé, in her job and with her room-mate. Her compulsive desire to please gave an interesting, fragile edge to her character. Jennifer Jason Leigh was also good as the room-mate, needy, childlike and childish, her face shifting between childlike need and rage.

Setting and photography were excellent. The huge old apartment, shadows of the staircase rising up the walls, pooling in corners, the perpetual lunar glow. For a while these elements made the movie compelling, like Hitchcock’s *Rebecca*. Then after about an hour in all subtlety seemed to drain out of the movie. The Leigh character lost all nuance and became a mindless psycho. The movie degenerated into just another slasher flick.

March 18

Pizza and wine with Pascal Colarco. I really like him. He’s intelligent but in a quiet, almost humble way. His intelligence glows as you start speaking to him. He never interrupts, cuts in with his opinion, nor does he lapse into monologues and spurious explanations. He is short, round and very fair, skin almost waxen. We talked about library school and universities in general.

He went to Western, which is Ivy League and old money like Queen's, and we had fun comparing the rich students and political conservatism. He liked my comparison of McGill and Queen's. Queen's is far better and more progressive on an administrative level and in human resources, but the students are far more conservative than they are at McGill. In an admin position I'd rather be at Queen's, but in student services I'd much rather work at McGill. At McGill the only energy comes from the students. The administration is as eroded as those crumbling concrete buildings.

Pascal looks back at Western very much the way I see Queen's. We exchanged old student stories, savoured some past exploits and enjoyed those memories. Yet as the evening went on we admitted we had sad and bad times at Queen's and Western; a lot of it wasn't so much fun. Pascal and I talked about class division and how truly awful it was living in residence.

We went to Thompson House and hung out for a while. It's a pleasant grad clubhouse and a good place to talk. Pascal is waiting to hear from Yale about a job, a two year internship on a new on-line system the library is developing. After the two years ends he will be the only person who'll know how to do this. He is feeling good about the interview. I have my fingers crossed for him!

**

Some notes from Crewtonia:

- Where did I hear about someone at Norton whose job it was to burn the old books that were taking up warehouse space? What kind of troll has that job?
- The stairs in New houses are uneven. I've heard many people on tours comment on the uneven heights of stairs and that it was poor craftsmanship. It fact, it was an early burglar detection system. Family members were used to the staircase steps and didn't trip on them. A burglar in the night would trip. -Heilan Yvette Grimes

– I just got some illegible and pompous rejection from Gordon Lish. Whoowhee! My story had a big ‘NO’ written across the top and was accompanied by a slip of pre-printed paper which stated in beautiful jargon, how the editors thought my writing was, well, shitty. Hmm, total turnaround time, about three days. At least I’m getting mail
<shrug> -Meg Galbraith

– Fowl: I saw the best fryers of my generation, breaded in cornstarch and pepper, sizzled in the frenetic sear of cast iron skillets

– What We Talked About When We Talked About Clam Dip

– Bob Hope was as animated as a paste-up picture of a long dead Soviet leader shoveled out to frown at a May Day parade.

March 22

Still trying to work on meaningful physical descriptions of people but not succeeding very well. I will make an attempt with Véronique. Véronique is small but she has a strong, rooted presence. Her hair is shoulder-length dark-blond, thick and lustrous. She moves quickly, bounces on the soles of her feet and scours the library like a bird of prey. Her grey-green eyes are often penetrating, very steady when she’s listening. The straightness of her eyebrows adds to that penetrating quality. She looks intelligent. She often dresses in shades of green and yellow, which perfectly suit her but would make me look sickly.

There are gold tones in her skin. She has a pair of horn-rimmed “power glasses” and when she wears these with a jacket she looks very intelligent and I’m sure she wears that combination when she’s dealing with clients from CPL. She loves French (from France) cuisine; pheasant, duck, quail, etc. But this description is so inert. It doesn’t describe her humour, self-centredness, sense of drama or her caution and desire to hold on to what she has. This is exactly why I hate physical description so much.

We went to L'Actuel after work, ate goat cheese and drank Bordeaux. So interesting talking politics with her. She's as interested in power and strategy as I am but unlike me she is extremely interested in financial research. I found out why Susan Baumann is still there. She's rich, we all know that, but I found out that her husband is VP Finance at Astral and there is some kind of connection with CP. Basically this arrogant, entitled woman is protected. She doesn't have to work, she's doing this gig at CP to keep from being bored in a city she doesn't want to live in.

Nicholas is going to the London School of Economics (for a year, I think) to study shipping laws. They've put any plans to have a baby on hold. He eventually joined us. Véronique and I were in our cups by this point and we sang Springsteen songs on the way back to the West Island.

April 5

Went to hear Jan Karski speak at McGill. He's a WWII resistance hero who worked to keep the Polish state in existence, underground, against Nazi occupation. He was a partisan and known for his intense desire to bear witness, to warn people about the Holocaust, to attract the attention of national leaders (including the World Jewish Congress) to Hitler's extermination of the Jews. He was given the title of Righteous Gentile by the Yad Vashem organization. Thrilled to see and hear this man in person.

We have a book written by Karski, *Story of a Secret State*, published in 1944. Fred got it from his grandmother's house. He took it to Karski to get it signed. Karski's eyes widened and he said, "This is ancient," and he guessed Fred got it from a grandparent. The book attracted a lot of attention from the audience. Interesting audience; old people, Poles, Jews, Holocaust survivors, a few students. So much like being in shul. Buzz of Polish. The friendly woman in front of us said, "Listen to them. Speaking in Polish. They speak Polish twice a year!"

The talk was held in the Frank Dawson Adams lecture hall in the McGill engineering department. Bleak and dingy as any Soviet engineering building. Long corridors filled with bleary light and doors distinguished only by signs that said, Dark Room, Spectrometry, Microscopy. The auditorium was a decrepit lecture hall pit; sloped floor, tiny hollow desks all attached in rows so when someone sneezes a row of people can feel the impact. The same kind of room where I constantly fell asleep in Psych 100. Only colder and danker.

Karski is a tiny man with hawklike features; delicate and ferocious at the same time. “I am a predator,” he said at one point, his hands curled like a raptor’s claws. He’s 83 years old with the fragility of fired glass. He wore a head-set microphone but there was a glitch in the wiring and his voice kept fading out. Eventually a man from the audience had to sit beside Karski on a chair to hold the wires. The crackling and hum of feedback somehow added to the talk, a wartime feeling. His voice cut out as if what he had to say was so important it couldn’t be expressed out loud. The hum of feedback added an eerie background sound to his description of Auschwitz. Broken English, broken speech. The message overwhelming his ability to speak.

I was struck by Karski’s resemblance to Oma, his playfulness, his crafty self-deprecating comments. From my notes on Karski’s talk: “Out of the blue skies this opportunity came to me … I met Lord Dunsany. I was nobody and he was an important man, not impressive looking, a small man, pompous, and only his eyes gave away his genius, a tragic look in them.

“Roosevelt was friendly, he asked questions, he asked questions about the Jews, he smoked continuously, his long cigarette holder held out just so, he listened to me and when the hour was up, it was up. He said our nation had a friend in him. Later I was told I had bowed so low he was afraid I would break the desk and when I left I backed out of the room, not even daring to turn my back on him.

“I met some British officials and they told me they couldn’t believe it,” Karski lifted his head and gazed at us, “Not that they didn’t believe it but that they couldn’t believe it. There will be many things in my talk you won’t understand … I speak to you like this because I am an old man …”

Best of all was the question period after the talk. The audience was a rabble and some of the questions were bizarre. Some weren't questions at all but statements. A Polish man stood up and in the very loose guise of a question demanded to know why Poles were considered anti-semites. Some audience members groaned. Others, like the man sitting in front of us called out, "Let him speak!" Indeed, just like shul.

Another man stood up and demanded to know how Karski could call himself a nobody when he was meeting with presidents, prime ministers, ambassadors. Other men asked questions which could only be answered in another hour long talk. The questioners were almost all men and they were quite aggressive. At first I felt sorry for Karski but he was able to hold his own, the predator ready to pounce.

A man pushed his way to the front and read some anti-semitic garbage quoted in The Gazette. The Gazette seems to be the ultimate authority for anglo men of all nationalities. To be fair, though, he read the quotation only to show how these attitudes continue to exist even in modern societies and he asked how someone could publish this dreck. Karski responded, "How can I answer that? I do not know the mind of a cockroach."

Karski said he had been so disillusioned by the reception he received from world leaders, and by the war itself, that he dropped out of sight for many years after the war ended. It was Elie Wiesel who brought him out and talked him into appearing in Claude Lanzmann's film, Shoah. "You can't say no to Elie Wiesel," said Karski, owlishly.

Though Polish, he is adamant about the Holocaust being a singular event that belongs to the Jews. It has to be remembered and exhumed because "the Jewish people have a wound in their souls." Other atrocities are atrocities but the Holocaust is the Holocaust. A Jewish survivor wouldn't have been any more ferocious about these facts. At times Karski sounded like an Auschwitz survivor. One of the questions was how Karski had done it, what motivated him to speak out in defense of the Jews when no one else wanted to hear about it. He gave the exact same answer all heroes give: "I had to do it, I just did it."

The evening ended on a strange note. The question period had just been closed but a large thuggish looking man in the back row insisted on standing up. He managed to say, “Why is it always the Jews” in a very threatening tone of voice. People wrinkled their noses as if they had been hit with a foul stink. The moderator said, “That’s another talk.” A graphic reminder there is no safe place, not even the bowels of an engineering building on a university campus near the end of the 20th century.

April 21

Went to see *Muriel's Wedding* with Cynthia. We met right after work and roamed around the Eton's Centre, tried on Liz Claiborne sunglasses. She has just returned from a week trip to Florida with Matthew, who is currently off on another tour with his band, this time northern Ontario and out west. She wants to marry him but she's very wise about it, says she's glad he's getting the band thing out of his system now. It helps that she's happy and comfortable living at home. I found the movie sadder and more serious than I expected. The Abba songs were a blast from the past, and there was a great deal of humour. But the family, the catty false friends, Muriel's entire world was so depressed, impoverished it overwhelmed the humour for me.

I couldn't get past the character of the mother. She was a sad, slow, submissive woman with nothing in her life. Brutalized by her husband and then by her useless wastrel son, she committed suicide, setting fire to the backyard. It was as if Muriel's new life made her aware of her own dead one, and she had no inner resources with which to change it. This was really disturbing to me. In some way the mother seemed like a sacrificial character, one that touched me far more than the transformed Muriel.

April 23

Saw *Latcho Drom*, directed by Tony Gatlif. A subtle film which invoked a lot of questions about borders, nationalities. The structure of the movie was designed to reflect the lives of the Romany, as borderless as their own lives. Or, as seemingly borderless as their own lives. It was a history of the Romany people seen entirely in motion, through the changes in dress, some of the physical geography and especially the music. A wonderful, imagistic, non-narrative film –“un film fleuve.”

Latcho Drom traces the road the Romany took from India to Spain. It begins with a caravan, complete with dogs, chickens, children, bangled women and moustachioed men crossing the orange sands of Rajasthan, singing of their wandering fate. These images melded into a group of Roma gathered in a courtyard by the Nile. Suddenly ragged kids are shining shoes in the alleys of Istanbul. Romania is next, signified by two old men on the drizzly outskirts of a muddy village singing a ballad about the fall of Ceausescu. The sense of dislocation increases as another band of Roma take a train across Hungarian fields singing, “We’re cursed … condemned to be alone.” In an even more barren Czechoslovakian field, marked by a closeup of barbed wire and snow, a Romany woman sings a lament about her experience of Auschwitz.

In France, the villages are picturesque, the fields are green. Spring, finally. We finally cross the Pyrenees to the streets of a Spanish town where a lone flamenco guitar inspires Romany women to dance. These are the most prosperous and well-dressed of all the bands. The changes were subtly handled. The glimpses of the countryside gave me a feeling of each place; real corners, colours, feelings of a country, not tourist or movie sites.

Although the film did not acknowledge national borders in any conventional or political way, you could tell when they crossed a border by musical style, dress, the poverty or relative prosperity of each clan. Every camp was influenced by, if not exactly part of, the country they were in. Fascinating and thought-provoking film.

**

Out with Véronique. She talked about her fascination with power and how she'll do anything to survive. None of it a surprise – except for her being so open about it!

April 29

Marsha left a message on our machine. Her voice was low, reverent, awed, the voice of someone who had just brought new life into the world. His name is John Martin Futtitt.

May 5

“An Internet Odyssey” came out in *Windsor World*. It’s better than I remembered and I’ve been getting compliments on it all day. Joan Moran called to congratulate me. Gerry Lafontaine said it was wonderful, and my favourite client, Richard Laferriere, told me he enjoyed it very much. Mr Vaillancourt, a project manager in C+C gave me his business card and e-mail address. Fred showed the piece to Dave McKnight. Dave thought it was excellent. He made copies of the article and is giving it out to people to some of his library colleagues at McGill. So gratifying!

**

Went to see Gogol’s *The Marriage* at the completely renovated National Monument. It was the last production of the year for National Theatre School students. It was staged as a comedy, full of slapstick and buffoonery. But in spite of the comedy, the ending was tragic. There was a very poignant little scene when the prospective bride and groom laughed and joked like little children and I realized this was what they had in common. They could have been children together. Instead, fear and the crushing institution of marriage told them apart.

**

Noticing how similar job search books are to dating manuals. These books devote chapters to your physical appearance, the length your hair should be, the correct colour of your Liz Claiborne suit, the exact way you should cross your legs, how to look inviting, yet uncompromisingly professional. How to release pheromones into the air to magnetically attract a potential employer. All of this sound just like a book from the 1960s, *How to Get and Keep a Man*.

Then there's *What Colour Is Your Parachute*, which is updated and reissued every year. After you complete the exercises in this manual you discover two things: You're too complex and intelligent for any job that pays money, and you don't have one single marketable skill. Your skills and qualifications line up with making license plates in the penitentiary. You turn to career counsellors like they are match-makers, wearing down pencils filling forms that try to match your skills with your ideal profession. You sit back and smile, putting faith in the expert professionals and imagining the perfect job is around the corner. I took one of those career tests at Concordia and got advertising as my number one career option.

May 16

I've been taking conversational French classes at the Y. Six hours a week, three hours every Tuesday and Thursday. The teacher is Marylène Favreau, a young, enthusiastic second-language teacher. She is not meek and mild-mannered and not the most sensitive person in the world. She has some definite ideas on teaching, exercise books full of grammar rules. She's very good at coming up with creative exercises for the class. She is also tenacious, doesn't let anyone off the hook and never lets anything drop. This is something I really need. I think she's a little baffled by us though. I don't think she fully understands how timid some of us really are, or how embarrassing it is for people who have accomplished some things in their lives to go back to the bottom and make fools of ourselves. We're not a dynamic group of students though. None of us ever wants to be first. We're all night-class adults trying to camouflage ourselves like elementary school kids.

Marylène is teaching us Québec French, which is also excellent. The first thing she said to us was, "Je suis une Québécoise." Already I've learned some Québec expressions – and also the futur proche, which isn't in any of the grammar books, at least none of the ones I've used. The class is an interesting mix of people. Leland is an artist and teaches art therapy, Stephanie wants to be a journalist, Anke is a photographer from Germany, Emilia is a dentist from Brazil, Laura is from BC and is doing her MBA at McGill. Antoine sells jewelry and has a store near Waldman's.

Trying to learn a second language is quite humbling. The world around you is suddenly vast, full of things you can see, smell, taste, touch, but can't name or describe. The simplest question or declarative statement feels hard-won, coming from a labyrinth of rejected words and very convoluted thought processes. The language, which is inside you, inextricably linked to your mind, is no longer valid. When you open your mouth you don't know if what has come out even makes sense. It doesn't matter how well I speak or write English. It doesn't matter as I haltingly recount in French what I did on the weekend. It is all reduced to "I went to the cinema. I visited friends. I ate in a restaurant. I painted the Sistine Chapel. I split an atom. I discovered the cure for cancer." French class is certainly a great leveller.

**

I think I know why *Wired Magazine* interests me so much. On the surface it's a cool computer magazine, very glossy with exciting lay-out, design and typography. Just picking up a copy gives me the same rush of pleasure I got when I picked up the first issue of *Details*. This latest issue of Wired is like holding a piece of the 19th century as it contains articles about, and references to, Madame Blavatsky, Theosophy, Darwin, Evolution, Biology, Paganism. It's as if all the ideas that galvanized the previous century are all back in different media at the end of this one. There's a feature on a geneticist who lives in a house William Osler could have lived in. The parallels are fascinating. Definitely back to the future. There is also a very strong religious-cosmological strain in the writing about technology and sometimes the computer cosmology is breath-taking. It's a grad student magazine leavened by deconstruction, religion and this deep Victorian royal society-discovery quality.

**

I really enjoy having a yard, the scent of lilacs through the window. At their peak, tiny precise blossoms. The magnificent blue spruce is releasing its pollen, little brown cases dropping off and revealing the tender new needles. The one little pine shrub I was afraid wouldn't make it through the winter is covered in soft new needles, like a fuzzy baby duckling. Even its scorched back side has greened a little.

The dogwood leaves have unfurled. But the hostas! Last year they were small decorous little patches of pretty leaves. This year they are humungous, genie leaves swirling out of the ground. Around back, the peony bushes we transplanted from J-P and Christine's yard have come out in full glory. Huge, soft, perfumed blossoms. I love peonies for their sheer bounty, their generosity. White blossoms look like melting ice from a distance, a vision of coolness. Ours are pink and they add a tropical quality to the yard and blend beautifully with the canopy of green on the pea tree.

I love the pea tree. This wonderful gnarly tree grows on its own schedule, lives its own life. Long after the other pea trees had leaves, our tree was bare. However, long after every other tree has lost its leaves ours is still green. It goes to bed and wakes up when it feels like it. An eccentric night-owl.

**

Went to Cap St-Jacques with Fred because I was curious to see what went on at a ham radio field day. Some drab military tents on a scrubby field, small trailers, trucks. Lots of trucks. Inside these tiny encampments men were beeping, squonking, scribbling codes onto regulation sheets of paper, Morsing, sending signals out into the hot air. The air was so heavy I imagined their signals bouncing back, the men listening to their own transmissions. No wind, hard to imagine signals being borne anywhere. A Rube Goldberg satellite device in the middle of the field, studded with tough stalks of grass, tent pegs, wires and cords. The whole area was like an intricately set up trap, a web of cords, bars, antennae, etc. Trailer set up for a small family. Simulation of a suburban bungalow with drab shag carpet, fake wood cupboards and counter. Two men sitting at the table scrying radios, a woman in the kitchenette.

**

Saw a movie, *The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill and Came Down a Mountain*. It was balm for the spirit on a sun-battered day, and the air-conditioned theatre didn't hurt. Story of Welsh villagers who pulled together to literally make a mountain out of a molehill, duping the English while they were at it.

The Welsh villagers were suitably rustic and crafty and the sly cracks and guerrilla tactics aimed at the English were fun. But what interested me most was the way the photography countered the story in so many ways. The real conflict in the film came from the life-affirming story juxtaposed with some very dark elegiac photography. It was as if the director, Christopher Monger, knew this story was a dream, one of those fragile moments during wartime, even as it was being told.

It was in the way the camera lingered over details as if they would otherwise be lost forever. There was a sense of fragility about this village, a sense of something that couldn't last, even though the ending affirmed the survival and continuity of the village. The events took place in 1917 and the absence of young men in the village also added to the strange moment in time quality. It was almost like someone's dream of a village and human nature. I left feeling both uplifted and a little melancholy.

July 2

Went to an exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts, *Symbolists: Lost Paradise*. A large exhibit, full of rooms to ramble through. Before looking at the art I enjoyed walking through the rooms, turning corners, descending ramps, entering enclosures. Moving through museums may be my favourite part of going. In a way it's appropriate because this exhibit isn't about the material world. It's about the world of spirit, fantasy, dread, obsession, the interior world so often hidden in small rooms like these. It's an unsettling interior world because there is no earthly connection, no grounding. Even those works that depict landscape are really depicting a state of mind. Landscape merged with state of mind, Earth itself something ineffable.

Human figures are diminished, elongated, distorted, bound, cocooned, mummified. Laid out as in death or mythologized. Caught between opposing forces beyond their control, or in intense isolation. Icons.

The exhibition was arranged thematically rather than chronologically or geographically. Each room featured a different theme: christianity, satanism, magic, places, death, children, myth and motherhood. Fascinating to see this juxtaposition of art from all countries in Europe, similarities that crossed all national boundaries. From Finland to the Czech Republic the same themes, styles of line, brushwork, fears, obsessions.

Interesting how many of the paintings had a collage or mosaic appearance. Some details, especially human figures, looked as if they had been cut and pasted on canvas. Klimt's work, in particular, looks as if it has been entirely assembled as a collage of tissue paper. It's partially because the figures are stylized to the point of transparency. The brushwork looks so jewelled, brilliant as if created out of precious stones. Other canvases feature brushstrokes fine as needlepoint.

Found myself looking at many paintings more than once. My eye would first be seduced by details, the rich paint surfaces. Then I would walk around the painting, approach it from a different angle. One of these paintings I kept returning to was *Orpheus in Hades* (Pierre-Amadée Marcel-Beronneau, 1899). A canvas full of riches. The cliffs of Hades are encrusted with detail, the paint texture full of eyes, heads which look as if they are peering through barbed wire. The paint itself seems to be full of ash and bone. I was so entranced by the marginal detail I almost forgot to look at the central, luminous figure of Orpheus. It was only by backing away that Orpheus became the central subject of the painting – which I guess is entirely appropriate and rather wonderful. It's also another way to make the human body, flesh and blood, disappear.

The intense luminosity of some of the paintings was breathtaking. Particularly Lemminkainen's Mother (Finnish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela, 1897). The figures in white practically broke away from the canvas while the pebbles, all individually outlined, arrested the gaze. And Night (Harold Sohlberg, 1904) was there. I have an old faded poster of it at home but seeing the real painting in its utterly luminous shades of blue made me weep – the effect was that powerful.

Also some photography; turn-of-the-century photographs that come as close to the void as possible and still leave a trace on paper. These ghost impressions capture a memory, a dream even as it starts to fade. Uncanny impressions, glimpses, fleeting presences. The spirit-portraits of Julia Margaret Cameron, as if there is no flesh and blood, but only an aura, an impression of light on paper to indicate a human being. I remember cataloguing slide after slide of her work as an intern at the AGO.

This art wrestles with nature, wanting nothing less than subjugation but never quite succeeds. This creates tension, a tautness. Long thin brushstrokes countered by twining curving strokes, which can't be completely suppressed. Instead, they are stripped, twisted, stylized. Also intrigued by how easily the crucifixion scenes graduated to Klimt and Beardsley. The cross is vertical, the body is long, vertical, limbs bound to the cross and to this position of verticality. This motif was repeated in the secular paintings, the androgynous figures in their flowing garments, giving the impression of having no arms, seemed to be related to the crucified Christs.

The Lady of Shalott was one of the most popular subjects for these artists. In most of this genre, the lady is laid out in her barge, paralleling actual deathbed photography of the Victorian era. In *The First Communion* (Eugene Carrière, ca 1856), a girl has been cocooned. Only her communion dress, which is a shroud of white, separates her from a dark oceanic background. She possesses no facial features or any individual qualities at all. She is undifferentiated from the chthonic forces around her. Instead of being a rite of passage into society, community, this first communion is swallowing her up, removing her individuality so she is part of a cycle, a ritual, dark background of natural forces.

Loved “the places” room of the exhibition. These paintings captured a form of enchantment and lost paradise but always with an undercurrent of unease; prison-bar pine trees, brutal symmetry, the palpable silence of a row of sphinxes, bramble thickets, unheimlich interiors where you would uncover fetishes and nightmares. Some paintings were impressionistic, resembling Monet or Renoir, but with something extra, going beyond the Impressionists. There's a quality of light that removes these paintings from earth, differing from the Impressionists whose landscapes of light and colour reflect the world itself.

The Symbolist paintings evoke a twilit world. Twilight at its peak, an instant before it is swallowed by night. There is an impermanence, an aching temporal quality to the light. A waning light and its intensity, the way it is fixed on canvas makes the landscape uncanny, unearthly. The scene may be a canal in Bruges but the golden light engulfs it, removes it from any city. *The Bush* (Giuseppe Pellizza de Volpedo, 1900-1902) epitomizes this. I could hardly bring myself to move away from this painting. It goes beyond place; place is irrelevant because what is really being evoked is feeling, deep memory, a state of being caught in this light and removed from the natural world. This state only lasts a moment but is fixed on canvas and is hypnotic.

Other landscapes, paintings of buildings are deceptively naturalists but you are drawn into them. It's the silence of the paintings, the lack of humanity, the intense stasis of the scene. It's this fixity, which gives the image its power, which dominates the gaze, not allowing it to move away. I noticed how difficult it was to move away from certain paintings, as if the eye itself was being subjugated. Also, the fixity of the scene makes the image dissolve. If your eye could venture just a little beyond the point of the image, the whole scene would dissolve into the void. Something intangible and temporal, the endless moment. The moment when flesh becomes spirit, life distilled to essence.

Aug. 4-6

Visited Marsha, John and baby Martin in Kingston. Martin is 100 days old now, born April 29. His eyes are starting to turn colour, a hazel swirl in the baby blue. He's in constant motion, reaching to everything around him, turning his head, waving his hands and feet, curling his toes, chewing, burbling, etc. A little like a sea creature moving in the water. His facial expressions change all the time from uncertainty to baffled outrage to perplexity over this strange world of air and light he's in now and unexpectedly he'll break out into a big smile. His full name is John Martin MacComber Smith Futtitt. Such a long definite traditional name for such a small creature. He doesn't cry often and this is good because Marsha is always telling him not to cry. She is acting exactly as one would expect Marsha to act with a baby; no changes in personality or mood.

John is a proud father and Martin brings out his quiet devotion, attentiveness to detail. He has become sharper over the years in his observations and I do enjoy his dry wit. He and Marsha were quite short and sarcastic with each other this weekend, and they've been fighting about Donnalee. Donnalee is getting married to Carl and is making Marsha and Marguerite buy \$500 suits for the wedding. John is not impressed by this. He said he would go to the wedding and be caustic. Marsha then proclaimed, "You are not going then, you are not to create a rift between me and my sister."

Spent a strange night in their basement, which I usually find very comfortable. They have been having a terrible summer with heat and noise. All-night parties across the street, traffic, shouting, broken bottles. Sounds like Tillemont. Their neighbourhood has been deteriorating and it's hard to know why. It's a really interesting part of Kingston, full of a variety of older houses and rambly streets. I would love to live there and I'm surprised the area hasn't been over-run with younger couples like us. On our first night there was a terrible all-night party across the street, this noise mingling with the strange garbled roar of the dehumidifier. So dark I woke up several times not remembering where I was.

**

Saw Eileen for the first time in ages. I'm not sure if we've seen her since Sophia's death. I was struck again by how lovely she is with her genteel voice and her soft-focus way of looking at the world. If it wasn't for her British accent you could think she was from the southern United States. But there's a youthfulness and *joie de vivre* underneath the mist and she loves the sea. We had a good talk about the sea and our Lewis R French adventure. She is definitely a woman from the old school, conceals her adventurous spirit under an appearance of deferential femininity. It's interesting to watch her when she's feeling impatient. She jiggles her leg but her facial expression doesn't change – it only tightens and the large blue eyes look a little shocked.

**

The weird second-hand bookstore has become a jungle. Ivy covers the entire building, dropping over the windows. The garden is wild with sunflowers and other flowers which are waist-high. You practically need a machete to take the treacherous little path into the store. The eccentric owner has expanded her territory and now has hand-written slogans posted on telephone poles across the street and down the block from the store, admonishing everyone to pick up their trash, etc.

**

We tried to get together with Ken Banks, who is working on his PhD/book. Apparently he interviewed for a job at RMC but didn't get it. Marsha bearded the obsessed Ken in his den and tried to entice him into meeting us at one of his favourite downtown cafés. He said he might not go; too much work. But we strolled downtown, passed his house, went to the café and he didn't show up. I was sure he wouldn't. When Marsha mentioned Fred and I were visiting he said it was too bad the main attraction (Karen) was out of town. It seems he only considers us as Karen's friends. I also got the distinct impression at that last New Year's Eve party that he had outgrown us, or we just didn't fit in with his academic friends.

No matter. We went on to a barbecue at Marilyn and Matthew's house. Delicious food and we went on their art tour. Inside their little frame bungalow with the brown-green linoleum is a collection of paintings and sculptures, many created by political artists from Cuba, Guatemala, etc. They are still deeply involved in social justice activism. Marilyn so down-to-earth and Matthew as gently airy and whimsical as ever. I always enjoy seeing them when in Kingston.

Aug. 11

The Net (directed by Irwin Winkler) is pretty good, IMHO under-rated by old movie critics who don't really understand the Internet. It's basically a melange of movie conventions: fugitive/film noir/computer-technology dystopia. But this is absolutely appropriate for the Internet and the elements all add up to something truly chilly and on the edge.

First of all, there's Sandra Bullock as Angela Bennett, who spends all her time with computers and has become an expert sysop. She's alone in the world, except for a mother who has Alzheimer's disease. When Angela's identity is taken away from her by a computer, she has no one in the world who can vouch for her. There is no witness to "Angela Bennett." I felt the chill of loneliness and danger throughout the movie. Unlike most movies, men are not heroes or rescuers. They either want to kill her or they are duplicitous and useless. The men are either killers or they are being killed. Because the movie is American, Bullock prevails but she does so entirely through her own strength and intelligence. I found that very exciting.

The film noir elements in the movie go very well with the Internet. The boxes that appear on the monitor beautifully reflect the office towers, and the neon blue MOTEL signs in noir movies. Nice camera work splicing the images appearing on the computer monitor with the outside world. The inside and outside are equally lonely spaces. Also, "Mozart's Ghost" is exactly the sort of thing you would find on the Internet and it repeats throughout the movie exactly the way it comes up on screen.

Details about computers are actually in the movie: the boxes, menus, repetitive steps, all the things that have to appear before you can do anything on a computer. These things were not edited out and they strengthen the movie. At one point, time running out, Angela has to crack this program and she puts the diskette in upside down. Yes! This is not a giant mainframe in some evil world capital. These are PCs in everyone's home, these are the gestures everyone makes when starting up a program, these are the boxes and sounds that repeat and are as familiar as a telephone ring. The computer dystopia is not out there, it's in your house.

Also well-portrayed is the screwy sense of history so many computer programmers and designers seem to have. The more technologically advanced we become the more we seem to go back to the past. It's like the way *Wired* constantly evokes the 18th and 19th centuries. "Praetorian" is exactly the kind of name a villainous computer hacker would come up with and "Mozart's Ghost" is right on as well.

Another element in the movie that applies so well to the Internet is the presence of crowds, what Kurt Vonnegut calls “false karasses” - rootless people compelled to bond without any sense of intimacy. These crowds appeared throughout the movie, on the Internet, demonstrating in the streets (wearing masks), at carnivals dressed in chicken suits. These crowds are made up of lone people like Angela Bennett, and like her, their identities are also taken away. The people on the Internet use aliases, the demonstrators wear masks, carnie are dressed in chicken suits. The world of the movie shows the impossibility of intimacy, the hundreds of disguises worn by people, whether in real life or through computer circuitry. In the end, *the Net* is no more anonymous or isolating than the “real” world. Angela Bennett’s aloneness parallels the world’s aloneness and this is the real danger in *the Net*.

Aug. 14

Nicholas Roy (Véronique’s partner) called me. I was so surprised by this I practically shouted, "Nicholas!" Of course Véronique was there and heard me. Nicholas had called to invite me to a birthday party he was planning for her at L'Actuel. Of course it was a surprise and of course I had just blown it. When I got off the phone, Véronique wanted to know why Nicholas was talking to me. I made up some story about him wanting a book at McGill, hoping he would catch on later this evening, when interrogated, that this was my inept cover story.

Aug. 15

Met Nicholas at L'Actuel, where he had everything arranged. The food was prepared, the wine never stopped flowing, there was a card at the counter to sign. Our friendly waitress was in on it. Eventually Véronique arrived with Carol. Carol had to use all her persuasive charm to get Véronique to come. It was hot and she wasn't in the mood for L'Actuel. Then her other friends came – four men. She was surprised to see me there and said it was strange seeing me there with her oldest friend, a history prof from UQAM, who did his dissertation on prison organization in Québec.

We had an interesting talk. We compared UQAM and Concordia, the two working-class universities in the province. I said *the Gazette* seems to have a vendetta against Concordia because it never ever prints anything good about it. The *Gaz* talks about exhibitions, conferences and concerts at McGill; corruption and decay at Concordia. He said it was the same thing with UQAM and U de Montréal. No one ever gives money to Concordia or UQAM. It doesn't matter what side of the linguistic divide you're on, the elites get all the positive press. He also recommended I get my PhD – not for personal fulfillment but because it leads to jobs. He has stats, which say that virtually everyone with a PhD in the humanities, especially History and Literature, is employed. I wish I had those stats to wave in the faces of the birdcage liner brigade.

When we left the restaurant Véronique linked arms with me and told me she thought of me as her adopted daughter. She, Nicholas, one of her friends from the party and me ended up at the top of Place Ville-Marie. It was like being in San Francisco. The city twinkled below me, office towers rose into the sky but I was floating above them. I had that magical feeling, the frisson, of being transported out of this world.

Aug. 26

Fred and I went to Séduction, a sex shop on Ste-Catherine, the rough sleazy area near Bleury. Two young people in tattoos and punk regalia were begging on the street corner, not taking rejection graciously. A few fake longshoremen, bikers, biker chicks, then I saw a true apparition making her way slowly down the street, like a ghost ship appearing on the horizon. A crook-backed old woman, desperately thin with ratted hair and a polished grand-looking cane turned onto Ste-Catherine from a ruelle. Her face was hollowed as a skull and covered in white pancake makeup, except for the black eyeliner drawn around her eyes. She was horrifying yet compelling because it was like looking at Death. As she came nearer I saw that she was wearing her shirt off her shoulder and I realized she wasn't much older than me.

The shop itself wasn't very interesting besides a great display of vibrators. Looked at the costumes and wasn't impressed by the cheap shiny flammable material. I would feel like a little kid in a store-bought Halloween costume. Packaged, assembly-line role playing.

Aug. 30

Fight at work. I could hear Heather screaming at Carol through the closed office door. I heard her say, "Why is that my problem? I've never missed a deadline in my life." Heather is a real apparatchik, collecting her vacation days, looking out for number one. She is the one person who never lends a hand on the front desk or helps with any research questions. Both Véronique and Penny have mentioned Heather's selfishness. Penny disliked Heather as much as Véronique does. In terms of power though, Heather is a thousand-pound gorilla. Gerry Lafontaine came in while this was going on. He stopped at the desk to speak to me, to "flirt" as he calls it. We enjoy talking to each other about writing and favourite authors. We looked at each other, he scuttled away and I became very very busy.

**

In my Merlin in-basket this morning was an official memo from President Rob Ritchie announcing the latest wave of restructuring. People are insecure. The mood is the way it was when I first started. All the Research and Operations Development (R&OD) engineers are worried. Wilson Pak has been coming in a lot lately. He is cute and funny, always cracking jokes. He joked today about all the rumours his own department has been spreading.

The VP of the financial research department gave Ken McGuire the go-ahead to get a departmental Internet connection like ours. I gave him the information I had compiled about Metrix Interlink and they are now hooked up on a SLIP connection with Metrix. Ken McGuire is a nice man with a sardonic sense of humour. Lately he seems very frustrated and resigned to his fate. He complained about how all his department does is chase after the same information, and he also complained about his boss.

His boss, Malcolm Cairns, showed up in BIS one day and asked me if I had seen Ken McGuire. I pointed to the back of the reference section. A minute later, Mr Cairns went storming out the door. Two minutes after than, Ken slunk out the door, giving me a significant glance. I was going to ask Ken if he had been given a detention but decided it might be better to mind my own business just then. I think the restructuring is driving everyone mad.

Sept. 22

The softness of yesterday turned into a slatey rain. Overwhelmed by bad news, bad vibes, so much conflict and rancour on all fronts, even the Internet. Fred has become entangled in some nasty business on his Feline list. People have been accusing a monk, Brother Bob, who is dying of cancer, of being a fraud. My Crewton list is also full of flame wars.

In neighbour news, Christine is leaving J-P. She can't stand the house reno situation any more. She tried to come up with a compromise and suggested hiring someone to finish the renovations. They have been living in a construction zone since we moved into our house. J-P insists he will do the whole thing himself and won't accept any time deadline. Christine said all she wanted in life was a home she could call her own and a good longterm relationship. J-P told her that was asking too much. So now I see the house across the street in the rain, unfinished and very sad. Ron Miller called him an asshole. He, along with everyone else on the street, is very fond of Christine.

Finally, as a chaser, I found out that Reilly Madsen died of AIDS on Monday. He was a lovely, generous man. I'll never forget what he said about love when I was with him and Jane that night at Moby Dick's, and what that did for me. Wandered around Place Ville-Marie as if I were sleepwalking, trying not to burst into tears. I returned home to discover a message from Marsha. She is coming to Montréal for the day with Bill and little Martin. It was good to hear her voice and I felt as if I had been rescued.

Sept. 23

Marsha, Martin and Bill arrived. Bill did Jerry Seinfeld impressions. If anyone can channel Seinfeld it's Bill. Bill was his usual mixture of wit and shallowness, hip and conservative. He must watch more TV than anyone else in the world. Marsha told us he finally admitted he's gay to her and John. Apparently he has lived most of his life concealing it from his mother and his high school, beer commercial buddies. John couldn't accept it – no one else in the group was surprised. Bill does have a stereotypical cattiness and aesthetic sense. He dresses like a super preppie and makes almost as big a fetish out of cleanliness as – Seinfeld. Anyway, he came to Montréal to go shopping and Marsha came along for the ride and I was very happy to see the three of them.

While Bill was off shopping, Marsha and I sang goofy old camp songs to Martin. "The Corner Master's Store," "John Jacob Jingleheimer Smith," etc. We share so much, Marsha and I, so many things from our childhoods. She is holding Martin a lot more and I got to hold him too, his tiny fingers curling around my big wrinkled ones, his silken skin, his face changing with every passing sensation. We went for a walk by the water. Perfect fall day, blue water, orange leaves.

Then we stopped off at a garage sale and were slimed by a woman's bigotry. Marsha, who has alopecia, was wearing a scarf with a gat on top of it. We glanced at the *Reader's Digest* anthologies, a rack of huge 1970s ties and various rec room doo-dads. A woman asked what nationality Marsha was – if she was European. I was taken aback by the almost lascivious curiosity.

Bill returned from his shopping expedition and we set off down the strip in search of a restaurant. These are the suburbs at their worst, a wasteland of fast food places, transplanted chain stores, discount fortresses. We ended up driving to Chenoys. Then just like that they were gone. I am so glad they came through. Their visit felt like a harbinger of better times.

Sept. 25

L'Actuel with Véronique, then a long walk downtown through Westmount, finally grabbing a taxi at Vendôme. We talked about the Referendum. She thinks she's voting no (against her principles) because she wants Québec to remain as it is now. I said I live better in Montréal than I would anywhere else in North America and I've been shifting from Non to Oui for weeks. I am deeply divided. When I heard that Michael Harris, asshole premier of Ontario, closed down all the halfway houses I changed my mind again and resolved to vote Oui.

Some of the No side arguments are convincing. But I would like to see a new country where social services, union rights and just a different attitude toward working class people will prevail. I want to see the French language preserved. I want the Québec difference preserved. I like the European sensibility here and feel more at home here than anywhere else.

But do I really want to break up Canada as a country, an entity, knowing what lies south of it? This is the division in my own heart, two loyalties and when it comes down to marking my X, which loyalty will prove stronger? As for the financial horror stories which seem to be all the No side can come up with as a campaign, I do not appreciate being threatened. Not long ago Julie and I were talking about the Referendum. She is strongly for the No side. We debated – her for No, me for Yes. Then we both laughed. She said she'd never get a job with the St-Jean-Baptiste Society and I said I had been kicked out of the Empire Club a long time ago. Very amusing.

Both Véronique and I like Jacques Parizeau. We are probably the only two people in Canada or Québec who do. I said I didn't think he was pulling out the stops, using issues like social services well in his campaign and Véronique said he wasn't running the campaign he should because "he's a smitten man." I like Parizeau's sense of irony and his sarcasm, the cutting quips he makes to idiot journalists. It's a little odd he's a politician because he seems to spend most of his life frustrated and impatient with the same idiots all the time, and unable to conceal it. Oh, I guess he does try to conceal it with a false bonhomie, but everyone knows he's laughing at them. That's why he's so unpopular. Parizeau is not a man of the people.

But neither is Lucien Bouchard, not really. It bothers both Véronique and me that Bouchard has such a high profile right now. Obviously this is good for the Yes campaign because Bouchard is the most popular politician in Québec I'm trying to understand his popularity. To me he appeals only to a base kind of emotion. Facts don't seem to concern him. I think he's a demagogue, the people know he's a demagogue and that's why they like him. He stands under portraits of Jesus with Oui posters arranged around the portraits. So blatantly obvious and so popular. It works every time he does it. This is the thing that disturbs me most about the Oui side. I also think a lot of people will be voting yes without even realizing a yes vote means separation and not just more power within Canada, and Bouchard is perpetuating illusions. Not the way to start a new country. As for me, I am a house divided, I won't know which way I'm going until I'm actually in the booth.

Sept. 26

Lunch with Gail. Ravil has a new job at Westmount Library. He's Associate Director of Public Services (I think). Much more money. He did it in a time-honoured way – getting revenge on McGill. He took all his vacation time, got this job and has been working at Westmount for a month. He just gave his official letter of resignation to McGill yesterday. Not that dissimilar to how I left McGill. I did give them a day's notice! I'm so happy for him. I love it when good things happen to good people. Now he and Gail may be able to buy a house and she can have the stability and things she's always longed for. Westmount Library is the diaspora for ex-McGillot: Lonnie Fleischman, Odette and now Ravil. Other news: Linda Ordogh is back at McGill and is interim head of Howard Ross. She won an award for one of her papers on the history of medicine at Harvard. Again, hooray! Another good person getting some recognition. Bob Clarke is head of the Law Library now.

Louise Colby quit McGill. She is still with Manfred (Prof Monti) and he has a job in Brandon, Manitoba. She has a part-time circulation job at the university library there. Gail said Louise was in town and visited Howard Ross not long ago and looked terrible, thin, drawn, no makeup (unusual for Louise) and after she left, Gail discovered money missing from the cash. I didn't ask about Pakistan.

Sept. 28

Went to the Bugs Bunny Film Festival. An absolute delight. I savoured every moment of Warner Brothers's jazzy inventiveness and witty dialogue. Bright colours, fierce explosions, sight gags. My eye was riveted to the skill of line and definition of colour; Bugs's grey and white, Daffy's fiery orange and black. Most of my favourite characters were present: Chilly Willy Penguin ("boid in a tuxedo"), Tasmanian Devil, Pepe Le Pew, Marvin the Martian ("these earth people make me very angry – very angry indeed"), Yosemite Sam, etc etc. The only character I didn't get to see was Foghorn Leghorn ("That's a joke, son. Pay attention.") I wonder why he was left out.

Happy to see some of my very favourite cartoons. *Duck Amuck* was created in 1953 but it's as postmodern as anything I've come across, especially in the relationship between the artist and his creation. The artist paints backgrounds for Daffy, which are all wrong and is lambasted by his creation. He erases Daffy, but Daffy fights each stroke of the pencil. It's an amazing piece of work. I love the fight, the literal cartoon engagement between artist and creation.

Then there was *Duck Dodgers in the 24½ Century*, also from 1953. The background was filled with wonderful space age contraptions, transparent chutes, geodesic bubbles, jet packs, mini-rails in the sky (which looked like my vision of the minirail at Expo, which was very space age to me at that age), all produced by Acme, of course.

These "mainstream" cartoons borrowed from everything and their creators had minds full of the pop culture of their time. Art (when Pepe Le Pew pursues a painted cat through the Louvre), science fiction, surrealism (the Hypo-Chondri Cat), movies, vaudeville, opera, all melted into these cartoons. It was amazing how many lines I could remember from childhood. This show is my childhood, a part of me.

My all-time favourite is *One Froggy Evening* (1955). A vagrant finds a box containing a frog who pops out with top hat and can, who struts, twirls his cane, sings, "Hello my baby, hello my honey, hello my ragtime gal." The vagrant becomes an impresario, rents a stage, entices people in with free beer. The curtain rises, the frog squats on stage with a hilariously belligerent, stubborn look on his face. He opens his mouth and says, "Croak." I really relate to this frog.

Sept. 29

The *CP Rail News* won an award for “Best Use of an Opinion Piece” (whatever that means). They won it for my “Internet Odyssey” article. No one told me. I happened to find out about it when Elise saw it in *BusinessWatch* and printed the announcement out for me. It was a good thing she did because Joan Moran from Human Resources (another big client department) called to congratulate me. I wouldn’t have known what she was talking about. Later I received a very pleasant Merlin message from one of my favourite clients, Mark Rickerby in Vancouver. No word from Ralph Wilson or anyone connected with the *News*. To say this company is secretive and arcane is reckless understatement.

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Neighborhood court in session. Talked with Wendy, Bob and Ron Miller about J-P and Christine. Christine sold out her half of the house to J-P. She’s still officially staying there until she finds her own place. While we were gossiping about him, J-P ambled over. He was very uncomfortable, almost on the verge of hysteria. His eyes were too bright and his attempts at neighbourly chat were forced. He knows Christine has the home-crowd support.

He made no attempt to gain our sympathies either and ended up acting like a macho dork. All he could talk about was how he had to give the white car to Christine as part of the house deal but he would buy it back. This was not gaining him any sympathy. Nor did his wild scheme of going to California to work (on building a house) this winter. Rom Miller couldn’t speak to him, wouldn’t even look at him.

**

Attempted to see Noam Chomsky at Leacock Hall (McGill). The lineup started inside at the auditorium and snaked through campus all the way to the Roddick gates. Lovely fall evening; warm and dusky. I enjoyed the astonished expressions on the faces of newcomers to the line, the lengthening fuse to the Roddick Gates. I didn’t get in but I rather enjoyed the people-watching. Chomsky seems to be some sort of academic superstar.

Oct. 11

Windsor is a Gothic pressure cooker these days. Everything has been put on hold. No one knows where the cuts will come or at what levels. There's a constant tension here, an ice-pick stasis, wheel of fortune spinning way over our heads. And the company is so secretive in the first place. This is the kind of environment ripe for rumours, gossip, odd encounters, outbursts etc. The station is a labyrinth and so are the channels of communication, if any exist at all. With all this bottled up inside these poker faces strange things are bound to happen. It's the time, place and season for the imagination to run wild. I haven't even mentioned the Referendum.

**

Malcolm Cairns is director of one of our top three client departments, Research and Analysis. He is new as no one has seen him before the last few months. Both Véronique and Julie detest him. They think he's anti-French and one of the most unpleasant people who ever come into the library, and they have foisted him on me. I seem to get along with him the way I often get along with difficult people (Ivan, Terry, Jane, Véronique for example). Mr Cairns looks exactly like any of those middleaged paunchy economists who swarm Ste-Catherine at lunch. He appears cold at first, stony-faced. But his face changes with amazing swiftness. He comes alive. His face lights up so it glows and suddenly you notice his eyes are a nice hazel colour. Within seconds the cold, off-putting face can turn into a warm enthusiastic one.

He has an edge. Even at his nicest he has a sarcastic edge. His voice is the same way. He has a light pleasant sounding voice with a sarcastic edge, British accent. He likes to come across as macho, rolling his sleeves up to get right down to it. In some ways he reminds me of those old economist scrooges from McGill, those demanding old Luddite profs who used to come into Howard Ross library, taking out their befuddlement and general scorn for technology on the staff. Mr Cairns is a familiar type to me because of McGill, which may be why I can get along with him when the others can't.

He has worked for the Treasury Board and the Ministry of Transportation and has borrowing right with the TDC. He is caustic, sarcastic, demanding, doesn't forget anything, cutting, sharp. He's also enthusiastic, loves his research, democratic (nice to lower levels). All in all not a relaxing person to deal with. Luckily, the work he gives me is work I like to do, usually involving universities and contacts with friendly government libraries. He does economic and quantitative analysis on rail transportation; mergers, competition among ports for container traffic, reviews of rail freight service, movement of commodities, etc etc. Anyway he is currently working on some kind of paper and came into the library wanting some info ASAP, but his department is notoriously cheap and won't pay for it.

I spent most of the morning verifying references, tracking down articles and finding out if, and where, various specialized journals were available in town. Most of these journals are only available at universities so he would send his admin assistant to copy the articles rather than pay us for interlibrary loan or document delivery services. So I pounded the catalogues, found titles, call numbers etc. But because I like to scoop the man whenever possible by trying to hit him with something he hasn't thought of, I included library hours and addresses when necessary. I gave him all this info in a package and his whole face lit up (he looked delighted) then he said admiringly, "You *are* efficient." Not exactly heartwarming but it is high praise from an economist!

When he returned later in the afternoon I was writing a note to Elise in her lair. Véronique found me and said, "There's a gentleman here to see you." She was being very cute and demure. It was Malcolm Cairns. This time he was trying to track down one of our journal issues, which was signed out to Mr Gantous, an assistant VP at CPL in Place du Canada. As usual Malcolm wanted it immediately. I told him I would call but I only ever deal with his admin assistant and I couldn't really do anything beyond that. Malcolm came around the desk, checked out the directory entry and said, "Assistant VP. That's no big deal. I'll call."

He sat in my chair and called CPL himself. I'm sure he was speaking to the same admin assistant I contact, but it was very amusing to see him make this macho phone call, introducing himself as Dr Malcolm Cairns. He did get what he wanted though. On his way out he said he was going to pick up the journal, then added something about "high muckety-mucks, the ones who are running the company into the ground."

After he left Véronique, Julie and Carol compared notes. Véronique and Julie think he has a crush on me, then they talked about how much they dislike him. They both said he's rude to them, he hates them and the library, everyone except me. They also think he's anti-French. I really don't think there is any kind of crush here. I think he likes dealing with familiar people and is awkward with people he doesn't know. And I'm sure Véronique and Julie are right about him being anti-French.

Véronique, Carol and I went for drinks on Crescent St. Later at L'Actuel, Véronique said the only thing she could find to like about Malcolm Cairns was that he liked me. She said she smiled at him for the first time today. I still think I get along with him because of my experience with anglos at McGill.

Oct 12

A punchy Malcolm Cairns. A journal he wanted was available only at U de M. The U de M catalogue was down, and when Julie called the library she didn't get an answer. He said, "And they want to separate, turn it into a third-world country." And there it was. I felt honour-bound to defend U de M and I told him they have a good collection, including a lot of expensive UK publications McGill doesn't subscribe to. Malcolm backed down, became quite amiable and said, "I shouldn't say that. Of course they do. They would have to." While signing something out to him I asked if he could vote in the Referendum as his residence is in Ottawa but he's "domiciled" in Québec. He wouldn't answer. He laughed and said, "*That* was delicately put." Malcolm Cairns took his plunder than said in a tone both playful and sarcastic, "Merci beaucoup." "Bienvenue," I replied.

I will never understand these people. They will tell you the oddest things while at the desk, yet if you remember what they said later and comment on it, they practically flinch. You can see someone for months, then one day make a little joke and watch them grow cold as if you've just made the Joke that Killed the World.

Oct. 13

To Ottawa to visit Val. Left work with my suitcase and backpack and boarded the Voyageur bus. Like last time, we spent the entire weekend in her apartment. We did Tarot readings, watched a video on Rochedale. We drank gin, smoked a joint and lusted over Robert Plant, Sting, all those weedy Brits with the angelic faces. We sang along with the music, reminisced about Elrond, moaned and groaned over getting older. It was really a marathon slumber party. Sometimes so vivacious and other times retreating entirely into her interior world. She can be so subjective, so emotionally intense, on the brink of self-destruction I sometimes forget the deep streak of pragmatism that seems to save her every time. But it can be hard to believe that outside this cloistered, spellbound apartment she has an outside life, work, co-workers etc.

Oct. 18

Malcolm Cairns again. He was trying to track down a journal, which is not available anywhere in town. It is only located at the Treasury Board and McMaster University. On top of it all, the article he wanted was listed as "forthcoming" and I couldn't verify when or if it actually came out, or under what title. I called the Treasury Board and the woman there told me she checked 1993 and couldn't find it. Suspicious, I called the Reference department at McMaster and got a very pleasant woman on the phone who verified both the title and the volume, month and year of the journal. Calling a reference librarian was good thinking on my part, if I do say so myself.

Malcolm came in and I told him about the Treasury Board. It turned out he had already spoken to the same woman, Lucille. He loomed at me and said, “They just don’t want to stick a goddamn package in the mail.” He said he had already tried to go there and get the article himself but “they wouldn’t let me in the door!” I couldn’t wait to tell Véronique and Julie that one. Then he said he would get the article through the title I had verified, from a friend who worked there. And there was again, the light in his eyes, the glow, as soon as he said the word “friend.”

I didn’t want the Treasury Board to think that I was sending my clients to their library so I called them with the citation information I got from McMaster and asked Lucille to fax the article to me since she did not sound enthusiastic about having him come in and get it himself. The article arrived and I called Malcolm. Like an uncorked genie he appeared in front of me, minutes later, this time in his economist scrooge persona. He stood there and counted every page of that fax, looked at every figure, making sure every word, every number was legible. I was expecting another stream of invective about poor Lucille but he seemed satisfied with the fax. Good thing too, because I had already checked it. I told Malcolm I asked her to send it by fax because she seemed less than pleased about him picking it up. He said, “That’s what happens when they close the goddamn library.” Then he said, “Thanks Lesley,” in a very pleasant voice.

**

MC again. He asked me if the Internet was causing libraries to close and all the old channels to disappear. I said I thought things had really changed in two years and places without libraries were becoming fiefdoms. Ken McGuire was browsing in the Reference area. Malcolm went up to him and said, “McGuire, what are you doing here?” Without missing a beat, eyes twinkling, Ken said, “Saving the world.” Then Malcolm said (again no missed beats), “In what dimension?”

Oct. 22

This is it. No more time to think. I have to decide Yes or No. Nothing in between. No Yes to somethings and No to others. We're voting in the advanced polls to make sure we don't miss the Referendum while we're in Michigan. I'm still a divided woman. No wonder this is a divided province. No wonder separation has shimmered into sovereignty. Reasons for voting Yes: I hate the direction Canada's going and I loathe most Canadian politicians right now, Michael Harris, Ralph Klein, Preston (Refo-o-o-rm) Manning. I want to believe that Québec would safeguard social services and union rights. But the ugly side of nationalism – all those white Québécois babies that aren't being born.

I'm sick to death of Daniel Johnson's broken-needle economic fear-mongering. His negative campaign only pushes me further into the Yes camp. It's difficult to vote against a dream, or to feel you're blocking the deeply felt desire of the majority of people. I love Québec and I feel it really is more than a "distinct society." It is a different country so why not work toward making what is true, true on paper as well.

Reasons for voting no: Of course the economy. I also believe that French may be better protected within federalism than if Québec was on its own. There is the reality of the marketplace, population disparity, US imperialism. Head offices will move (CP?). But the most personal consideration is I am a Canadian and can I vote against Canada no matter how disappointed I am in it these days. I also have to vote honestly. I can't vote just to be different. I can't afford the indulgence of voting against obnoxious West Island anglos. I cannot let my dislike of the anglo bastion overly influence my vote.

The poll numbers are deathly close. The atmosphere is grime and dead-locked. The politicians speak but all but Bouchard don't seem relevant to most people. We have all turned inside ourselves and the close numbers are bringing out fear and loyalties. People will not be able to vote against Québec; others will not be able to vote against Canada. Me, I am voting for the side I think will preserve social services, which I think is the biggest fight going into the next century.

25-29 Oct.

The Referendum front looms. The Oui/Non polls are tight with 15% undecided. The stress is getting to everyone. People at CP Rail don't talk about politics. With the heavy English it's obvious how most CP employees will vote, but no one has said anything until today. All of a sudden the Referendum is on everyone's mind and it's starting to bubble out. Rachel, in the Buffet, was wearing a huge Non button. If nothing else, she knows her customers and I noticed her tip cup was overflowing.

Mike Di Mambro came in today to see Véronique, as he often does. He always wears a suit and shirts that look like they are buttoned up to his chin. Today, out of the blue, he started talking about politics, in particular the huge Non rally taking place in Verdun. He assumed both Véronique and I were voting no. He photocopied something from the Financial Times of London about the Referendum and gave a copy to both of us. Véronique and I looked at each other in amazement. The CP anglo pressure cooker is starting to boil over.

Shortly after this, Gail called from Howard Ross about the Referendum. She wanted to fax me an ad for another large Non rally. She was very emotional about the Ref and as usual, she related Québec politics to the personal, to her own family. But instead of ranting about "pur laine" French she said something beautiful about the languages of love and how you can't separate them. She has a lot of French in her background and said when she was a small child, her aunts, cousins and grandparents would talk to her in French. Family talk, intimate childhood expressions, words that to her, even now, mean love.

It goes the other way in her family as well. Many relatives on the French side married into Irish and English families and heard English endearments. As Gail said, how can you separate this. How can you vote to separate yourself from your childhood, from the deepest things in your past, from the languages that mean love? This was the most passionate and beautiful appeal to unity I have heard. She also noted that it is so hard to move the English and it's taken them too long to become emotional over the Referendum. I wholeheartedly agreed with that, but as I've seen lately at work, the emotion has finally come out. I only hope it isn't too late.

**

Left at five to begin the trip to Michigan. We are meeting some of Fred's Internet friends in Lansing and also visiting his cousin Carol in Bay City. Leaving Canada feels a little like fleeing a sinking ship as if we're Referendum refugees. Spent the night with Marsha and John in Kingston. They're heading out on the long road south to Florida. I can now picture that hallucinatory interstate, Motel 6 signs floating into view. Their first major trip with little Martin.

**

Road to Michigan. Leaves mostly gone, fragments of gardens. The long low roadtufted with remnant forest, the colour of sackcloth. Crossed the bridge to the USA at Sarnia, over a bleak sea. Bay City is industrial with a large wealthy area staked by the robber barons of the last century, who built their mansions as monuments to themselves. The houses stand on great lawns, moated by landscaped gardens.

Only the bare trees indicate these neighbourhoods go through time, seasons and even the vagaries of fortune like every inhabitant of this planet. Fred's cousin Carol, her husband Bob and son Peter live in a robber baron's gatehouse in this well-heeled area. The house is lovely, complete with its own landscaped garden. It's the kind of house where you might expect to come across a team of PBS woodworkers. But I do find it amusing to think of pretentious Carol living in a gatehouse.

Inside, the decor is rather bizarre. It is designed to resemble Oma's as much as possible. An eerie Edgar Allan Poe-like replica of Oma's house in Eefde. Poe-like due to its extreme staginess. It is a set – not truly lived in. I'm not sure how much is part of the original design of the house, or how much Carol and Bob have renovated but the house is laid out like the country house in Eefde. The entry hall is long, extending to the back and gives an impression of a vast space. I think there's even a lantern hanging in Carol's entrance.

Turn down another hallway and the bathroom is concealed in the wall with a wooden door. Oma's rude little toilet boy is perched above the door, just as in Eefde. In this hall is Oma's ornate cuckoo clock and a Madame Recamier sofa. The living/dining room is like the big room in Oma's house, furnished with slippery lacquered furniture, a Chinese screen, large cabinet and manor-sized dining hall table with room enough to sign the Treaty of Versailles. "Room for a pony," as Hyacinth Bucket would say. The walls are decorated with paintings by Carol's "pet artist," much as Oma's walls were hung with her Spanish paintings.

I suspect Carol's natural taste, when she's not posing as Oma, is very similar to Sharon's. The house is an odd mix of Oma and Sharon. The guest room is decorated to look like a bed-and-breakfast room with its own bathroom and sink in the room. It is painted white and a wallpaper pattern of flowers careens up and down the walls. I'd swear Sharon has the exact same pattern in her house. But there are traces of the middleclass suburban mindset in Carol's grandiose self-recreation. The bookcases contain only christian books from the 1970s (our teenage years), the Robert Fulghum kindergarten book, a few old family reference books, the same book by Henrik Van Loon that Fred's mother has. Carol will have to work on those bookcases before she achieves true old-money acceptance.

At first Bob La Chance got on my nerves. He was a lot older than I remembered and he has an extremely literal mind. But I discovered he is very nurturing, takes care of the house and is Carol's office administrator. He came alive when he talked about riding alone on his motorcycle. I liked him best when he hopped up on the spotless kitchen counter and sat crosslegged, talking about one of his day trips. I detect tension between him and Peter, Carol's son from her first marriage to Don Austin (from Grosse Pointe, don't you know). Peter was nice enough but there's rebellion there. He has classical posh features, a Leonine head, sculptured features. He could have appeared in *Triumph of the Will*.

Also met Carol and Bob's artist friend, Paul Kusmierz. He's the one who saw photos of me last year and thought I was stunningly beautiful!! He is witty, urbane, aristocratic. He's part Polish, part German and plays the role of Weimar Republic intellectual with his neatly clipped goatee, dazzlingly clean striped shirt, knife-edged crease in his pants. The cafés of Vienna or Budapest seem more his natural habitat than Bay City Michigan. We had a great talk. He said that unlike Carol I am a true liberal and that my sensitivity and knowledge is deep, intuitive and borderless. He said I'm everything Carol isn't. I enjoyed his company very much but it was easy to tell he is fascinated by Carol. When Carol finally appeared Paul lost all interest in me, became subdued, faded into the background, engaging only in banter with Peter. He left early to give "family a chance to talk."

I went to bed early to let the cousins talk. According to Fred she bragged about herself and declared that doctors are geniuses because of their ability to analyze. My only response to that would have been a resounding QUACK so I guess it was a good thing that I went to bed. Carol isn't all bad. She has a psychological bent like her mother, and can sometimes be insightful, especially about her family with whom she is obsessed. She is nowhere near as smart as she thinks she is. She has a rather plodding mind. Both Aunt Lynn and her sister Debbie are light years more intelligent than Carol. But Carol will never stop trying to usurp the crown (or decorating gatehouses to legitimize her reign). The thing I dislike most about her, more than her braggadocio, is that she is a snob. I don't meet many true snobs in my life.

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Fred's Internet buddy, Connie Crew, lives in Lansing, in a neighbourhood as different from Carol as possible. Connie's neighbourhood looks a little like Munchkinville in Kingston, a jumble of houses, all of which have seen better days. There was a Party Store on the corner – this seems to be a Michigan-wide chain of variety stores. Connie's house is tiny frame square, buff-coloured, Beware of Dog sign in the window. Inside, the house is warm, full of cats and dogs and generous hospitality. No snobs here. No Dr Genius Van der Harsts here.

I liked Connie immediately. She's generous, down-to-earth, humorous, intelligent. She listens, questions, makes up her own mind about issues. She works as a computer systems operator at the University of Michigan and regaled us with stories about that redoubtable institution (an asylum like McGill). At one point she said she once voted Republican because her parents did, but now she thinks for herself and refuses to support that party because she hates their attitude toward the poor. This is my favourite kind of person in the world – someone who isn't formally educated but who uses her mind and heart. Gail is like this. We sat at the big round kitchen table and talked while various cats and dogs visited us. I looked at the floor, stripped to the wood and thought about what a contrast it was to Carol's white princess carpet. Here there are no worries about leaving tell-tale tracks.

**

All day BBQ at Bill Gorman's house. Bill Gorman set up both the Feline and Canine-L lists. On the list he comes across as a laid-back sixties guy, a conciliatory mediator who generally stays in the background tending the server unless there's a problem to solve. He looks like a hippie with his ponytail, jeans, plaid shirts etc. In reality, Bill is a member of the Michigan militia! He likes to wax philosophical and after you listen to him for a while you start picking up a streak of paranoia about the federal government. Then you discover how much that paranoia colours everything he says. He doesn't proselytize but like evangelical Christians, he'll say things that sound innocuous but are really veiled remarks, in his case against the government. He uses words as code and when you discover his militia affiliation a lot of things about him start making sense.

Bill and his wife live in a tiny suburb of Mt Pleasant. Suburb isn't the right word. It looks like some of the tiny neighbourhoods that honeycomb Daytona Beach, the ones hidden by the tourist industry. All of the roads are dirt, more pick-up trucks, Russell Banks territory. He is building his house and it was all under construction, a tall yellow Victorian structure.

It is also a compound built for self-sufficiency with a wood-pile, large garden, shelves full of squash and gourds, all covered with plastic sheets that continually flexed in the wind. Inside, everything was also under construction; temporary walls, fake doors, boardwalk halls. Smell of fresh wood. There is a huge freeze-drying unit by the entrance. It looks like a cryogenic case and makes the pantry look like Frankenstein's laboratory. I was somewhat relieved to see it was full of gourds.

People arrived throughout the day adding warmth, colour, cheer. We all helped ourselves to food and coffee. Bill sat benignly on the chair. His eyes are clouded blue, a milky quality. Possibly a glass eye? He talked about climbing up the roof to rescue one of his cats. Then we talked about Brother Bob, the fake monk who has been using the Internet to manipulate people for his own obscure purposes. He created a great deal of havoc on Feline-L for a while. Brother Bob has an Internet connection through the Montréal vendor, CamOrg. Bill grew very interested when I mentioned knowing about CamOrg through my own search for a local commercial vendor for my workplace.

He became even more interested when I mentioned how strange I found CamOrg, how I wasn't sure who or what CamOrg was as their connection is highly unstable and they really didn't seem very interested in commercial business. Bill pounced on this, certain it was a front for the government. He expected me to react with alarm or shock but we Canadians are completely unfazed by government.

Then he said he was fascinated by the nature of reality and asked, "How does one know if something exists if we don't see it?" His first example was nuclear missile silos. He speculated on the notion that the moon landing was fake. Fred then interjected by asking if anyone in the room had been to England. No one had so he lobbed the question back to Bill. "How do we know England exists then?" Diki Gust joined in by saying she had crossed over the Thames in a plane. Bill's increasingly one-track government musings were derailed as we, in ridiculous Monty Python accents, speculated as to whether or not she had actually crossed the Thames. She saw a body of water, a river out the airplane window, but couldn't possibly know if it was really the Thames. Bill graciously bowed out.

**

We had the choice of returning to Carol's gatehouse for an evening at the symphony, or spending the night at Connie Crew's. No contest. While at Connie's we watched Detroit news. The Québec Referendum was mentioned in passing. Little was said about it, no details or context given, making it sound completely surreal. Detroit news was frightening. News anchors with shellacked hairstyles spoke into microphones in front of gutted buildings, car fires in the background. Just once I would like to see a news show narrated by people who actually live in these places, spoken in their voices. As it is, it's like hearing our world described by androids. This was the Saturday night before Halloween, known as Devil's Night and a curfew was imposed on the streets of Detroit. Scary stuff.

Oct. 29

Entered the dark heart of Montréal just before the Referendum. All the stress returned immediately. Non parade on the West Island. While Detroit was in the throes of Devil's Night, the Island of Montréal was full of Oui and Non parades, starting up in various regions like bonfires. Graffiti sprouting on walls: Anglo Go Home; Nous n'avons pas le peur. Nous disons <<Oui>>. Advertising on the bus and Metro for the Oui side. Election signs torn down, vandalized, like the sign with a lobster placed in the middle of the O in Oui. (This was in reference to a remark made by Jacques Parizeau about leading Quebecers to separation like lobsters in a pot.) Some birthday messages on the machine but most people left messages about the Referendum.

Oct. 30

Referendum Day. I've been listening to the Forrest Gump soundtrack our neighbour Christine gave me for my birthday. All those songs from the 60s calling for world change, and also expressing a summing up, a reckoning. "Let's Get Together"; "San Francisco"; "California Dreamin'"; "Turn Turn Turn"; "For What It's Worth." All I seem able to do today is listen to them, stare pensively out the window, applying each and every song to the Referendum.

My stomach is in a knot. I look at the trees, the flat grey sky, leaves rolling over the yard, the pumpkin on JP's porch, overturned blue box. I keep hoping for a sign, a clue. I almost wish I were at work, occupied by a million mundane tasks. But here I sit, every word of these songs making me think about mass movements, idealisms, change. But also reckonings, consequences.

Which way will the vote go? Will I be in Canada tomorrow? An embryonic nation-state? It doesn't help that it's a particularly flat, bleak day, not revealing anything, holding its cards close to its chest, presided over by a poker-faced sky. No clue, no refuge in the world of little houses, straight streets, a day as still and revealed as an x-ray. CBC run-downs on the vote sound like wartime bulletins. Looks like a record turn-out.

**

Christine came over for chicken dinner and Referendum results. She's an election junkie and a staunch francophone supporter of the Non side. Fred turned the computer room into a viewing chamber, two TVs set up so we could switch from English to French coverage. Great watching it with Christine. She gave us the lowdown on some francophone politicians like Pauline Marois. Lots of gossip.

The Referendum was deadly. The three of us sat glued to the TV, almost unable to breathe in case a sudden exhalation tipped the balance from one side to the other. The Yes side took an early lead with rural Québec going solidly Oui. Camera cuts to deliriously happy Oui side supporters, raising the fleur-de-lys; pensive and sober Non side supporters. But the whole province was waiting for the results from Montréal island, the largest and most diverse population in the province, the only city with a large population of anglo and allophone voters – and also francophone professionals who support the Non side.

I wonder if the Montréal results were deliberately withheld until the other regions came through. The timing of the results seemed a lot like a last minute rescue by the Cavalry. Made for exciting TV. This was as riveting and deathly serious as the first Canada-Russia hockey series, just before Paul Henderson scored the winning goal for Canada. End of the last game of a deadlocked series. The results were announced at 10:30 and the three of us just gaped at the screen. Non: 50.4%, Oui: 49.6%.

Only a sense of fear and profound relief could have made those No side supporters so jubilant, and only the very close polls of the last week could have made the Yes side feel so close to the goal, enough to look so depressed over these results. In my opinion the Yes side won. Except on paper.

Then there was the parade of politicians, the police lineup of the usual suspects: prissy Preston Manning with his dreary sermons, macho Ralph Klein, the inexplicable presence of Bob Rae. Chrétien of course. Who could really be passionate about a country governed by this collection of rejects? Of course on the other side, we had Bouchard oozing messianic charisma, flesh-eating martyrdom, engulfed by the Red Sea of his “own people.” Christine told us that Bouchard has already split up with his American wife, Audrey Best and is sleeping with Corinne Coté – René Lévesque’s widow!

And speaking of that icon, Bernard Landry appeared with his hair plastered over his scalp, looking like a wax effigy of René Lévesque. Daniel Johnson inflicted an endless droning speech on his poor supporters, which made me appreciate Bouchard a little more. His speech was quite even-handed and gracious.

But the shock of the night came from Jacques Parizeau, who could not hide his bitterness. He stood, made a great show of solidarity with his Yes side supporters. He looked rumpled and emotional but as usual, also looked as if he were laughing at everyone. This is the man who called Quebecers “lobsters heading for the pot.” Unlike Bouchard, no lip service to democracy. Instead, he blamed the Yes defeat on *money and the ethnic vote*. As nasty an “us vs them” nationalism as I have ever heard here. An old fed-Lib apparition from the Trudeau years, Marc Lalonde said Parizeau was drunk when he made that speech. No doubt, but I think he knew what he was saying as he is nothing if not an ironic man. He was dropping the politician’s mask and saying what he is really in his heart. I think it’s a swan song and that he is going to resign. A nasty way to go out. Life just seems a little murkier tonight.

Oct. 31

I was right about one thing: Parizeau resigned today. Many people on the Yes side are appalled by his speech and are disassociating themselves from him. Fall-out continues. Walk around downtown, you can physically see what has happened here on an emotional level: construction pits, exposed fault lines, tectonic plates grinding apart. All the suits taking a wrong step and ending up in the underworld.

Bernard Landry, PQ deputy premier, went on a rampage in a hotel, accosted an ethnic hotel employee and blamed her (and her kind) for blocking the aspirations of the majority. Very nice ... very gracious. I wonder how long these poisonous ripples will continue.

**

First day back to work after vacation and the Referendum. I pulled Envoy messages from libraries addressed to ill.quebec expressing hope Québec would stay in Canada. Touching and a little sad seeing these hopeful messages after the event, when no one is feeling hopeful. I was happy to see a lot of these messages came from Alberta.

Sir Jefforie called. It was great to hear from him. Like everyone else he wanted to hear about the Ref, and said a big busload of people from Orillia went to the massive Non side rally in Hull. As always he was full of gossip about people we used to know. He says he's a confirmed bachelor. I get the feeling his family is putting a lot of pressure on him to meet someone and settle down. He's the only boy with four sisters. But he hates the "dating scene." He hasn't been on one of his pilgrimages to Dallas for a long time, but has instead bought himself a new sports car with Great Gatsby vanity plates. He said he's going to be a hermit on his 40th birthday. It was such a treat to just talk about something not related to politics with an old friend.

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Saw *Le Confessionel* by Robert Lepage. I liked it. It wasn't as vivid as one of his theatre plays, but I got a sense of Québec City in the 1940s, the Chateau Laurier brooding over the streets, Alfred Hitchcock's visit, the patronizing English assistant, the Catholic church. A moody Hitchcock feel to it, which perfectly suits Québec City.

Nov. 15

At work, clients have been very nice to me lately but it's almost an end-of-the-world kind of nice. Almost sad and a little eerie. The clients who have been coming in don't seem to have any work for me to do. One of my favourites, Wilson Pak came in. He was trying to track down a couple of volumes of the AREA Bulletin.

He is with Research and Operations Development, which is directly under the knife and has been for a while because they're Support and Research. I always see little groups of R&OD in the buffet talking, joking, spreading rumours about themselves. The other research department, Research & Analysis are tight as clams, clinging to each other. I took Wilson down to the storage room dungeon to see if we could find that bulletin. While we were there he showed me an article about CP in the paper and then a photo of his little daughter. Basically I wasn't helpful to him at all; it seems we were just hanging out. Such a curious time, end times, uncertain futures, everyone feeling more or less in the same boat. Tom Machnikowski (R&OD) came in to see if I was still working here. He thanked me for everything even though I hadn't been able to help him this afternoon. It sounds as if people are saying their goodbyes.

Jack Cline, from the same department, roared in in his jovial way. He is a large hearty man with a booming voice. Very nice man. He and Elise have a nice friendship. He told me he saw my second Internet article in Windsor World ("Internet '95: Turn-of-the-century Capitalism") and said it was really good, well-written. He pointed his finger at me and said, "You have a lot of fans."

Speaking of the article, something neat happened in the buffet lineup. I was waiting for my afternoon coffee when I heard two men in front of me joking about the restructuring. One said to the other, “I hope we’ll all jump out of virtual windows.” He was quoting the last line of my Internet article. Cool!

Nov. 20

The rumours had been circulating for a week but the official announcement came today. CP Rail System is moving its head office to Calgary. Although the news was announced in all the papers this morning I stayed in the office until I saw the Merlin announcement from President Ritchie. Brutal restructuring and Calgary. Back to the job search boards, back up the hill to McGill, cap in hand. I hope Theo Lawrence still needs people.

Nov. 29

Malcolm Cairns came in to collect some info for his boss, Katharine Braid. He was expansive, jovial today and we actually had a conversation. I asked him if he was going to Calgary and he said yes, all the managers are going. He said he’d go out for a year and then see about arranging to return, as his home is in Ottawa. He asked about the library and I said I didn’t know anything but if it survived it would go to Calgary. He agreed as if there couldn’t possibly be any question. He said he was in charge of resources for Strategy Development and he considered us a resource, he strongly believes in libraries and we have his full support. Then he pretended to make a check mark on his paper.

I mentioned that no one in BIS wanted to go. “I guess we’re all just easterners,” I said. He smiled and said, “I’m from the far east.” Then he said Calgary was a nice city and he likes the west, western culture, etc. “My wife’s from Texas,” he added. I can see that in him. He said the difficulty for him was that his wife works full-time and it wouldn’t be easy to let go of the double salary. On his way out he said, “You won’t lose your job, Lesley.” Not sure how much credence to put into that but it was great to hear something positive for once.

Nothing but office gossip for the rest of the morning. Heather, Betty, Ginette and their old crony Anne Cornay hissing in the back corner. Later in the buffet some people in line singing the “Bonanza” theme song.

Dec. 8

Went to the MUNACA party with Fred. It was held in the gloomy concrete student union and I didn't see Cynthia, Jane or any of the Howard Ross crew. I did see a long 6th Floor table. I guess I should say Tech Services since they're no longer on the 6th floor. While I stood in the food lineup, Angela Murgita called my name and they all waved at me. Going to McGill feels like returning to Barrie and my feelings about the place are so strong and complex. The warm welcome made me wish, yet again, I had never left. I joined their table while Fred went off with his Medical Library mates.

Talked with Michel Morin about the situation at CP. He knows all about it because his neighbour works there and says the head office move marks the end of an era. Also talked with Louise Nadeau about lay-offs and the economy in general. Definitely a gloomy post-referendum feeling; it's not just Windsor Station. Talked with Kathy Watt and said I wasn't looking forward to calling Lynne Murphy for a reference. “I really don't blame you,” she said. We all started playing volleyball with balloons.

The band started playing and Brenda got up to dance. She was wearing snazzy shoes with high heels. Kathy and I joined her and I never believed in a million years I'd find myself boogeying to 60s music with Brenda Stevenson and Kathy Watt. Brenda, with her OCD, has always seemed so fragile, tragic even, a tiny glass figurine under a glass bell. I forget sometimes she is flesh and blood, my age, and sometimes in the mood to dance. She is a lot of fun. Fancy that! She said she misses my Bugs Bunny jokes. I miss her humour and the big smile that changes her whole face. I have always liked Kathy and it was fun dancing with the two of them.

Dec. 14

CP Rail party held at the Sheraton. Carol Lacourte invited me to go with her along with Isabel Bliss, Laurie Mitchell and Laurie's brother Gordon in HR. Isabel, Laurie and Gordon are all about my age and at CP, it's unusual. Nice talking to people my age, a range of experience and viewpoints we can take for granted. Isabel Bliss (great name!) is an analyst in the Government Affairs department and although BIS is part of this larger group, I had never met her before. She never comes into the library.

Sometimes she calls me with really odd particular questions, and I always end up calling a friendly reference librarian at Webster Library to help me out. Why she can't call Concordia herself is beyond me, and Véronique detests her. Which I guess is why she always foists these questions on me and not Véronique. But in person Isabel reminds me of Patty Archer in the way she speaks, also in the way she's both friendly and reserved. There's a thoughtful, watchful quality to her and I really like her.

Laurie Mitchell took Isabel's place while Isabel was on maternity leave. Laurie is friendly and outgoing, nice to the point of seeming a little saccharine, even patronizing at times. She has a master's degree in public policy and says she and her family have always argued about politics and it's in her blood. Her husband is in a band, The Groove Kings, which I've heard at the Jazz Festival. I was feeling very excited and optimistic, being invited by Carol and hanging out with Isabel and Laurie. It made me feel as if I might have a future, or at least a good professional reference. Isabel complimented me on my black and scarlet dress. "It's you," she said. Then I saw Heather, Betty and Elise clumped together in the lineup to the coat check, looking at me, immediately looking away again. I know I started blushing and could feel myself becoming quiet and awkward.

No beginning or end to the falling snow. The IBM building had never looked more delicate, half-erased, fading into the snow. The city looked soft and enchanted. I skirted the fringes with Laurie, Gordon and Isabel. Glanced over my shoulder and saw the Research & Analysis group very closely circling their redoubtable leader, Malcolm Cairns.

He was clearly on stage, jabbing his index finger in the air, his face full of that animation. I couldn't hear what he was pontificating about but I imagined him saying things like, "TO the barricades, men! We will fight them on land, on air, on the sea." Ken McGuire was scowling and not paying any attention to him. MY favourite, Richard Laferrière wasn't there at all.

Met some people from Corporate Communications, which is also under the Government and Industry Affairs umbrella. I never see them in the library either so I don't know who they are. They seemed interested in talking to me because of the Internet articles. Met Lucy Payette who works on *the CP Rail News*. She is interested in taking Creative Writing at Concordia. We talked about Toni Morrison and books we've read recently.

Met Rick Robinson from Visual Support. He was fun and we talked about the Internet. I really enjoyed talking to him. Talked and joked with Wilson Pak, who was as debonair and humorous as ever about our futures or lack thereof. We joked about our dying professions and trying to find something else to do with our lives.

Dec. 19

Went to the Government & Public Affairs party at the Canadian Press Club. I only went because I thought the press club would be housed in an impressive old Empire building, like the faculty club; wood and gilt, high ceilings, old men in ascots leaning over the bar. It wasn't old or impressive at all, just a suite in the Europa Hotel with only a few editorial caricatures on the wall to indicate anything related to the press. The party was stuffy and claustrophobic. I left early with Elise and Memima Kanu from Translation Services, who had gone for exactly the same reason I went. She was also very disappointed.

Dec. 20

My x-mas party dance card is full this year. I was invited to the G&PA party for Gerry Lafontaine, who is retiring and moving to his house in Smiths Falls. I went with Laurie Mitchell. He hasn't talked much about it to me, but I think he's feeling a little nostalgic and sentimental, holding on in his own way to old friends and colleagues. Carol didn't think he really wanted the lunch but he was very gracious and made the rounds of the table and talked to all of us individually. Carol had invited me as one who is close to him. We have had many good conversations at the desk about books, travelling, Sligo, Imminent Victorians, Cormac McCarthy, the list goes on. I will surely miss him.

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Malcolm Cairns came in to return all his books. He asked if I knew anything about the library's future. I said I hadn't heard a thing and expected we'd be the last to hear anything. He agreed. He was on his way home – to Ottawa. He wished me a Merry Christmas and told me not to let any of this ruin my holiday. "See you in 1996," he said. I appreciate his optimism, the only person in the company who doesn't see me as a doomed character from a Dickens novel.

Dec. 29

Val came for a New Year's visit. Met her at Librairie Mélange Magique. Although it is located beside the Toyota dealership on Ste-Catherine, it exists in a different world. You climb up the narrow staircase and enter a world full of crystals, oil in vials, smudge pots, goddess figures, books on astrology, shamanism, Tarot, Native and Celtic spirituality. I drifted around the store feeling as if I were pulled by a tide. So much doubt about the future. I can't see any way I won't lose my job and have to go on the search yet again. Something has ended yet nothing has appeared to take its place. We spent ages in the store. It reminded me of the old days with Jim and then the astrologers, of going to Metamorphosis and Ésotérique.

We both decided to splurge on Tarot readings with the in-house reader. I found the reading an interesting experience but strange. The reader, René Gui, and I really didn't connect. My questions were all about work because this has been foremost on my mind. All René wanted to talk about was sex and relationships with men. I admit things aren't going well on that front right now, but I don't want to talk about anything personal with him. He was also using the Crowley deck. The Crowley deck was created in the years between 1938 and 45, the war years, and it is a striking modernist work. I also feel that its history and time period should be dealt with in using the deck. The lines are often spirals leading to a vortex. There's a powerful drawing-in of energy. Or they soar into the upper corners of the cards, into space, into the future.

The card "Adjustment" pictures a blue, slablike Superman figure with scales, holding a sword. There is stasis in this figure, in the design of the card. Completely symmetrical and balanced; a sinister balance. The figure is bound, frozen in that state. For me, the card evokes the towers and slave labour in that terrifying film, *Metropolis*.

The figures in the cards are anonymous; no individuality in their faces. They are only receptacles filled with power; monuments. Some of the major arcanum cards like The Star, The Moon and The Empress are beautiful with sweeping lines, curves, circles. The Empress could float into the sky like a soap bubble. The eye is often forced into the card. There's a subjugating force in this desk. The Universe is also static with the same rigid symmetry. Full of serpents, webs, nets, the central figure falling into the vortex.

I think you have to be strong and aware to not be pulled into the vortex along with the figure. I also think you can become infatuated with your own power with this deck. It's an artifact of this time period in history; war, fascism, huge forces beyond individual control, ideologies and mechanism. There's also a strong technological quality in the cards. Flight, speed, circuit boards, figures which look like Luftwaffe bombers in the sky. Inexorable grinding movement of masses; heaven and earth moving above and below.

I thought the reader was a little infatuated with his own power. My question was about work. The cards were interesting: Ruin, Worry, Disappointment. René did catch on that this is a crisis affecting a national company and is closely tied to the economy of the entire country. The Crowley deck was very appropriate for mass movement, forces beyond individual control. In this case downsizing, restructuring, lay-offs. René said the world was crumbling around me but that I would be all right, that I was all right now. All kinds of knights kept appearing, reversed, indicating men interfering in my life for their own obscure purposes.

René wasn't connecting with me at all. He shuffled the cards, often sweeping them up and starting over again. When I asked if the cards had any clue as to my true work, he said I would find another meaningless job that would pay more money. I wasn't exactly overjoyed when he tried consoling me by saying I shouldn't feel bad about that because there are a lot of people in the world who are meant to do meaningless work. What kind of Tarot reader says that? Seems that card readings are pretty dependent on customer service.

I fell in love with the medieval Scapini Tarot. This deck is an intriguing blend of the medieval and a 1960s style (which was when it was created). Unlike the Crowley deck, all of the figures are individuals with different personalities. Tiny cities appear in the background like embroidery; glimpses of onion domes, vaguely, generically Oriental. It reminds me a lot of Cirque de Soleil. The cards look like mosaics and as Val pointed out, they have a Russian or Eastern Orthodox sensibility.

Val is exploring Paganism. She knows all the local groups and is increasingly taking part in rituals and services. She's even taken a new name, Morag, and calls on the White Lady for guidance. She doesn't know how far she's going to go on this path. She is so bright and original (Uranus in the 1st house) you can forget how conservative she can be. She has been steeped in a conservative form of Lutheranism for most of her life and jokes about being a Pago-Lutheran. She became involved in Paganism through people she met at the Reality Bites virtual reality café in Ottawa.

After leaving Mélange Magique, we continued down Sherbrooke, looked through sci-fi books in a nearby store, picked up bagels at the Faubourg. We popped in and out of clothing stores along Ste-Catherine. I was tempted by an X-Files “The Truth Is Out There” t-shirt. We’re both big X-Files fans. Spent ages in a fabric store and I watched Val appraise buttons, silks, satins, velvets. Then we entered Sam’s where we couldn’t tear ourselves away from a rack of cheap CDs. After crossing into the sleazy part of Ste-Catherine, we ended up in Boutique Séduction where we compared vibrators and dildos, made Monty Pythonish noises, laughed, scoffed, poked, prodded the merchandise. I was fascinated by a set of ben-wah balls and imagined them on the bus. So typical – starting off at Mélange Magique and ending up at Boutique Séduction.

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Next day we continued our tour of the city – antique stores along Notre-Dame. This area of the city is full of old mercantile buildings, which used to house printers, etc, interspersed with entire blocks of new public housing townhouses and apartments. The antique stores are dark brick and wood with elegant picture windows. They look as if they’ve been here forever, transplanted from Balzac’s Paris, standing in perpetually rainy or snowy weather. Great wooden rocking horses, old lacy things, Limoges dishes. Interesting juxtaposition of Old Québec and British empire. Entire stores fill of British stuff, so many coronation souvenirs, staffed by French proprietors who can barely speak a word of English. Onward, to the Medieval Store and Drags. Val ogled the costumes and plotted how to make her own. Drags was depressing this time; empty, spellbound, the ballgowns locked up, the long gloves and beaded bags sealed in cases. An old rich world forbidden to us.

Returned to Mélange Magique but it wasn’t as peaceful as it was yesterday. A woman, who I think was Haitian, entered the store and started shouting at the clerk about a discount. The clerk called the manager and the woman became more belligerent. Finally the clerk looked the woman in the eye and said, “I will not listen to you if you continue yelling at me.” The woman backed down, still grumbling about the discount but no longer yelling. A little while later the manager called and the clerk had to give the woman her discount. But I was impressed by the clerk’s calm firmness and I told her so.

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New Year's Eve. We had a fire (in the fireplace). Val and I played with our Tarot cards, drank gin and then roistered all night. We turned the music up so loud Boris threw up because he was upset. We lay on the floor listening to *Dark Side of the Moon* until we eventually fell asleep. What else did we do, or contemplate doing? Val called François and then left a message on Doug's machine. We both sent loopy e-mail messages to Thomma Calton in Tennessee. She is one of Fred's Feline-L buddies and is great. She responded in kind and send a great drunken loopy message back to Val and me. First time in ages I started the new year off with a monster hangover. All worth it though. Mad and magical things happen when Val and I are together. And Boris was just fine (his usual gluttonous self) in the morning.

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